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Texas McCombs

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Viral Videos Get a Boost from Sharing Big

Want your videos to go viral? Expand your platforms.

Based on the research of Vijay Mahajan



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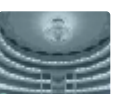
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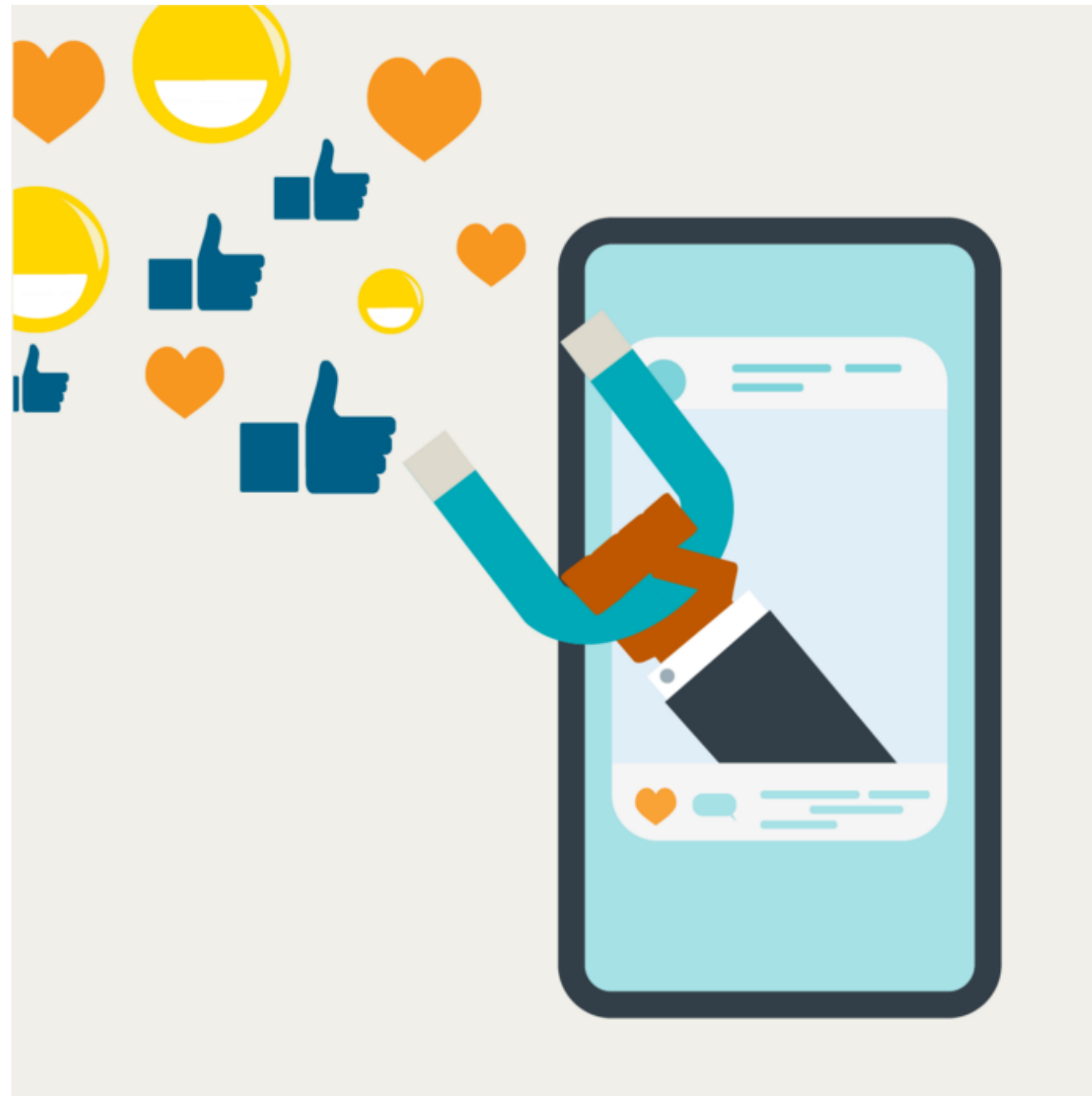
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How audience



Brands that want their promotional videos to go viral can benefit from quickly taking advantage of the so-called spillover effect.

As consumers become more resistant to traditional advertising, companies are increasingly investing in videos they hope will go viral to promote their brands. Interest in viral videos, however, is short-lived, and guidance on how to sustain momentum is sparse. But platforms and content creators can keep interest in the

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content alive — and bump up views in the process — by posting on multiple platforms.

“There’s a spillover effect,” says Vijay Mahajan, professor of marketing at Texas McCombs, co-author of a new paper that examines consumption of viral videos.

“If you, or other people, post your content on multiple platforms, it will help you. But don’t get too greedy.” —
Vijay Mahajan

Posting on more platforms offers diminishing returns.

So, introducing a video that has been posted to YouTube, for example, on a new, secondary platform like Vimeo seems to create word-of-mouth awareness that spills back onto YouTube, the original platform, and lifts views there. What’s more, secondary platforms that target a non-English-language audience create greater spillover.

Spillover is a well-known phenomenon when it comes to introducing a new product. For example, an artist who releases a new album sees a boost in sales of prior albums. That can also hold true for authors who see more sales of previously published books when they write a new one. Spillover effects can also be created by consumers across markets. A product introduced in France becomes popular in Germany through word of mouth.

To show how positive spillover effect works when it comes to viral videos, Mahajan and his colleagues Haris Krijestorac, Ph.D. ’20, of HEC Paris and Rajiv Garg of Emory University analyzed data on viral videos from a marketing metrics agency.

Their findings offer practical advice for companies and content creators who might be tempted to restrict video content to a single platform to build a base of followers and even ask others who've reposted their content without their permission to take it down. To truly grow interest in video content to the benefit of their brand, content creators should pursue multichannel marketing, developing a presence on a broad set of platforms.

Taking Control

Mahajan and his colleagues looked at daily view counts of 1,382 videos viewed over 671 days between 2009 to 2012 across 26 platforms including YouTube, Vimeo, and Daily Motion. The videos promote household-name consumer brands in food and beverages, beauty and fashion, and technology, such as McDonald's Corp. and Apple Inc.

Companies originally loaded their videos onto YouTube. They were then later uploaded onto additional platforms by independent users of the platforms. The authors whittled down these videos to ones considered viral, or for their purposes, videos that received more than 100,000 views. They ended up with a final data set of 381 videos from 348 unique companies. Of these 381 videos, 32 were introduced onto multiple platforms.

On average, these viral videos were introduced onto new, or "lag," platforms, about 20 days after they were loaded onto the original, or "lead," platform. Mahajan and his colleagues found that introducing a video onto a lag platform approximately doubles subsequent views in the lead platform as word of mouth snowballs. This so-called spillover effect from posting on a secondary platform is the strongest in the first 42 days after the original video has been posted.

“There’s an assumption that virality is fairly random, and you’re at the mercy of the crowd. But there’s marketing action that can stimulate word of mouth that makes you not so at the mercy of the public.” — Haris Krijestorac

Suggestions for how to make videos viral include:

- Publish content on multiple platforms spread over time and develop a multiplatform omni-channel strategy so you can benefit from cross-platform spillover.
- Don’t neglect local platforms and audiences. Targeting them will allow you to reach a larger audience and have benefits even to your global audience.
- Multiple media sharing platforms can benefit from one another. Local-language platforms can generate significant word of mouth for larger global platforms.

The authors found that the lift in views is the strongest within the first few days after a video is introduced onto the second platform, with significant spillover also coming on days 18 and 42. Posting onto additional platforms in addition to the secondary one generates less and less spillover, so the benefits are not endless.

Planning for Spillover

Findings suggest that digital platforms cater to different audiences and that experiencing a piece of content on one platform does not necessarily serve as a substitute for viewing it on another platform. In other words, content creators should understand that platforms don’t cannibalize one another.

Mahajan and his colleagues wanted to test these findings, so they conducted a small-scale field experiment to see whether they could replicate results. They identified 46 early stage viral YouTube videos and uploaded a random subset of 19 onto Vimeo at random times. Videos included those made by Fortune 500 companies such as United Airlines and Apple, talk shows such as “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon,” and informational channels like Vox.

The authors then compared subsequent view growth on YouTube for both the videos uploaded to Vimeo and those that were not. They found their initial discovery held true: Videos posted on a second channel saw a lift in views in the original channel.

Marketers should keep this phenomenon in mind while planning their content, says Krijestorac. “It’s important to be present on multiple platforms,” he says. And that may also hold true for other forms of digital media, the authors say.

Think about spillover when you’re posting photos or infographics too. If you’ve designed a snazzy new infographic to promote your company’s brand, post it on Facebook, but then always follow up on a second platform like Twitter too.

“Although our study focuses exclusively on videos, the results may apply to other forms of media — like images — and goods — like books or apparel — when the consumers are distributed across multiple platforms to enable word of mouth,” Krijestorac says.

“Cross-Platform Spillover Effects in Consumption of Viral Content: A Quasi-Experimental Analysis Using Synthetic Controls” was published in the June issue of Information Systems Research.

Story by Deborah Lynn Blumberg

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