

VIROLOGY

WORKBOOK



CHAPTER 6

SELF ENHANCEMENT



SELF ENHANCEMENT

Someone once told me the only reason people post status updates on Facebook is to make other people jealous. Well this might not be true exactly—no-one wants to be known as an egotist. But it is true that people will share content for a reason. Oftentimes people share content to maintain their self-esteem and personal worth.

People share content online to self-enhance.

Mother Nature

Mother nature wants us to be successful. I don't mean making lots of money, that isn't success, I mean achieving in life, with our relationships. If we're successful with our relationships with others, then there's more chance our genes will get passed on and survive. Mother nature wants humans as a species to survive, and it does this by motivating humans to have families, and being able to look after and nurture those families.

The mechanism that mother nature uses to control how successful we are in our relationships with others is related to our mental wellbeing, known as self-esteem. Self-esteem is essentially how good we feel about ourselves. When we have high esteem, we're more likely to be happy and have successful relationships with others around us.

Self enhancement is one way that people protect their self-esteem. Self-enhancement is interpersonal activity aimed at boosting beliefs that one is a lovable and capable human being. This is often achieved by comparing ourselves to others. When we feel we are better than others, it makes us feel good. It boosts our self-esteem.

As a result, people manage information

about themselves to convince themselves that they are capable beings. People strive to deny undesirable aspects of themselves. Self-enhancement refers to claiming as much good as one can about one's strengths and achievements.

As part of self-enhancement, we all have a tendency to have overly positive evaluations of ourselves, think we have more control over our destiny than we actually do, and for the most part be overly optimistic. Gamblers for example may think they're good at gambling, and have a better chance of winning than the statistics would suggest. Accordingly, gamblers often convince themselves that this time they won't fail. Self-enhancement motives convince the gambler that they can win.

It's not necessarily that your friends are trying to make you jealous, but rather that they're attempting to put themselves in a good light in comparison to others. That photo of your friend on an exotic trekking holiday is designed to make them feel good, not make you feel bad, even though it might have the unintended effect of making you feel envious. Knowing that others in their network might not have the same opportunity as them improves their self-esteem.

EMOTIONS



Expected Engagement

People estimate how others will feel. Content that makes people laugh, or otherwise feel something is more likely to get likes and comments.

One way to get a shot of self-esteem is from positive feedback. On social media this usually means sharing stuff that people know will get them engagement.

People get a shot of self-esteem when someone appraises or acknowledges something they've shared. Getting positive recognition for sharing something on social media is like a pat on the back, or earning respect. It helps the sharer to feel good about themselves.

In fact, there is risk with sharing since not getting engagement can have a negative effect on self-esteem. If the recognition is insufficient, people would often rather delete the content than suffer perceived judgement from others against their failed efforts to self-enhance. Not getting a reaction has a negative effect on their self-esteem.

So people prefer to share content that they believe will get engagement.

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WHY GOTHICS WEAR BLACK

What is sharable?

It always starts with understanding the value system of who it is you want to share—usually your target market – those people who you want as customers.

Take for example the goth culture. Part of being a gothic is looking the part, with the black clothes, black nail polish, and pale skin. Gothics go out of their way to look morbid. As with other groups in society, members of the gothic culture are bound by the same values, beliefs, and interests. Hipsters grow big beards, sports fans wear their team colours, and surfers wear board shorts. Wearing the outfits and adornments of a group in society signals to others which group we identify with. Why? It's because humans are tribal. We're social animals who prefer to live and socialise in groups, partly for protection, and partly for survival in terms of food.

How does this relate to sharing? Well, knowing the values of your customer gives Marketers insight into what types of content their target audience is likely to share. Gothic conversation is likely to revolve around gothic music, gothic looking clothes or

something else they all share an interest in. These things define their value system.

Gothics use membership cues in conversations to validate their shared membership. Sharing images of a gothic nature allows members of the Goth culture to signal their allegiance and membership, just like wearing black.

QUICKSILVER

If you identify what it is that binds your target market together, you're half way there. However, oftentimes its not plainly obvious. To create sharable content you really need to understand your customers values. NOT just what their interests are, but what really matters to them.

Take for example Australian Surfing brand *Quicksilver*. While their competitors were busy taking same old photos of surfers inside the barrel of a huge wave, they cleverly identified and tapped into the Australian surfer's value system, and created content that went viral.

Quicksilver identified another unique part of the surfer's culture and value system. All surfers care deeply about the environment. And the health of the ocean.

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Quicksilver produced an image that featured a surfer was riding inside the barrel of a large wave. Like a standard surfing type promotional advertisement. However, they made the image appeal to their target audience's value system in a clever way.

The photo was taken at Java, an iconic surf location in Indonesia. It's a very common scene used for surf advertisements, but this one had a special difference. The difference was that there were pieces of pollution clearly visible in the water, including food wrappers and other pollutants that obviously didn't belong.

The image of the man surfing a beautifully perfect wave with clear blue skies, though tainted by the presence of so much pollution created a sharp contrast. If you're a member of the surfing culture you'll know that the health of the ocean is something that all surfers hold dear to their hearts.

The image was highly sharable because it enabled surfers to signal *Membership Cues* based on their environmental concerns at a legendary surf spot. The only difference between the Quicksilver pollution ad and any other typical surf ad was the presence of the pollution. The typical image of a man surfing a

perfect wave would likely never have gone viral, because it's something that's tied to surfers' interests rather than their core value system.

Things that get shared tend to appeal to people's value systems more than just appealing to their interests.

THE BOMB WAVE

All surfers care about waves. Sure they do. But that's common amongst all surfers, and it's part of the culture in Australia, and one thing that all surfers value is the search of the perfect wave. Australian surf brand Quicksilver wanted to appeal to their target market by integrating the freedom and lifestyle of the surf culture with a unique location. Rather than the usual beach scene, they set the scene [in the middle of a city](#).

The video ad begins by showing a group of young men walking the streets, with one of them holding a surfboard under their arm. The movie uses shaky low resolution footage to create the illusion that the group are being filmed happenstance by someone with a mobile phone. They come across a city pond with a bridge over it. The one with the surfboard

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unzips it from its cover, and paddles out into the middle of the pond. As he's paddling out the rest of the men start crossing the bridge. When they're halfway across, they produce a cluster of dynamite sticks. One of them lights the dynamite and lobs it into the pond. The resulting explosion causes a huge wake that turns into a surfable wave. The man with the surfboard paddles to catch the wave, and starts surfing it. Punk music plays as his friends whoop and holler in the background.

The movie appealed perfectly to the culture of Australian surfers. One thing surfers spend a lot of time talking about is locations around the world, and where to catch the perfect wave. Freedom and the perfect wave. Creating an explosion in a pond in the middle of a city. That's the most unusual location to surf you can get!

Action Plan

SELF ENHANCEMENT

TUTORIAL

CREATING SELF ENHANCING CONTENT

People self-enhance in different ways, and for different reasons. Understanding self-enhancement motives in your target audience is a critical step in the initial phases of creating an online marketing campaign. This requires an understanding of not just their demographic characteristics, but also their psychographic preferences—their values and ideals. It's often not so obvious what people care about. If you're not part of the group culture yourself, you have to do some digging.

One way to gain insight into your target audience's values and ideals is to listen in and observe their behaviour. Find out where they hang out. This doesn't necessarily mean you need to stalk them in the real world. It could be as simple as joining the same Facebook groups or discussion groups. Of course you could also run focus groups if you have a budget. The aim is to figure out what really matters to them, what ideals they would stand up for, and what it is about the world that they would miss the most if it were gone.

As my discussion earlier about the surfing culture illustrates, oftentimes it's not the obvious that matters, but rather the culture of the group they belong to that they really care about. Surfers are not inclined to share just any picture or video of someone surfing a wave—they all surf, and there's nothing so special about sharing an image of someone else surfing. While researching a target audience you have to dig deeper to discover what it is about their value system that binds them together.

The starting point for crafting sharable content based on self-enhancement motives is to identify shared core values in your target audience. Once you know what matters to your target audience, the next step when creating self-enhancement motives to share is to design a reason for sharing. There are three reasons for sharing to self-enhance:

1. *Membership cues.* Recall that members of a group are bound by common values or beliefs. If you attend the group's social meetings you'll eventually discover what those values and beliefs are—since the topics of conversation give clues about what they might be. Motorcycle clubs will mostly talk about the lifestyle of riding a motorcycle, such as near misses with cars, or long distance adventure tours. These are membership cues—basically things that members in the group think is important and that they all share an interest in. People use membership cues in conversation to confirm their membership in the group, like showing your ticket to get into the show. Sharable membership cue materials for motorcycle enthusiasts might include things like: Dash cam footage of motorcycle vs. car conflicts, unique motorcycle tour moments, or motorcycle sports achievements. If your target audience are motorcycle enthusiasts, any of these would aid motorcycle enthusiasts to signal their membership legitimacy.
2. *Impression management.* People share content to manage other people's impressions of themselves. The usefulness of content that can shape people's opinions is that it circumvents the need to inflate their ego or say something directly that other people might find cocky. Content that enables people to manage impressions includes anything that signals something about a character trait that is revered. For example a middle aged man might share a picture of a customised motorcycle to remind his peers about his passion for freedom, rebelliousness against the aging process, and connection to his youth. Note that his reason for sharing might not necessarily be to seek agreement from his network over the beauty of the machine.
3. *Approval cues.* There's nothing like the feeling of approval from those around you. When you get applause, or a laugh, or even a simple pat on the back, it can give you a tremendous boost in self-esteem. The equivalent of this in social media is the Like, Retweet, or Thumbs up (depending on the social media platform). When people share something under this motive, they're seeking approval from others. Some types of things people share to earn approval cues include: recent purchases made, recent sporting or life achievements, or amusing situations.

TASK

With your target customer in mind, formulate reasons for them to share your content under each of the three categories discussed in the tutorial on the previous page.

Membership cues

Impression management

Approval cues

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