

The Impact of Lexical Sophistication on Virality

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Abstract

This paper addresses the key objective of brands on user-generated content platforms: to create content that goes viral. Given that (lexically) simple and thus comprehensive textual content is shared more by consumers, and given that content posted by high-status brands should be shared more due to the associated stronger status signal, it should follow that simple textual content, posted by high-status brands, is shared the most. We show the opposite, namely that this intuition does not hold. In fact, based on supportive evidence from secondary data covering the watch sector as well as pre-registered controlled online experiments, we find that the higher the content's lexical sophistication, the more it is shared if the brand is of high status. In contrast, if the brand is of low status, then with higher lexical sophistication, the posted textual content is less likely to be shared. Most importantly, our multi-method work demonstrates that congruence between the content sophistication and the brand status increases, *only* when the content sophistication complies with the brand status.

Keywords: User-generated content, social media, online communication.

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