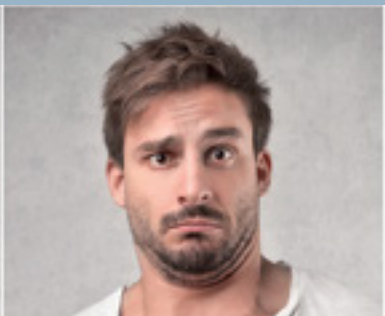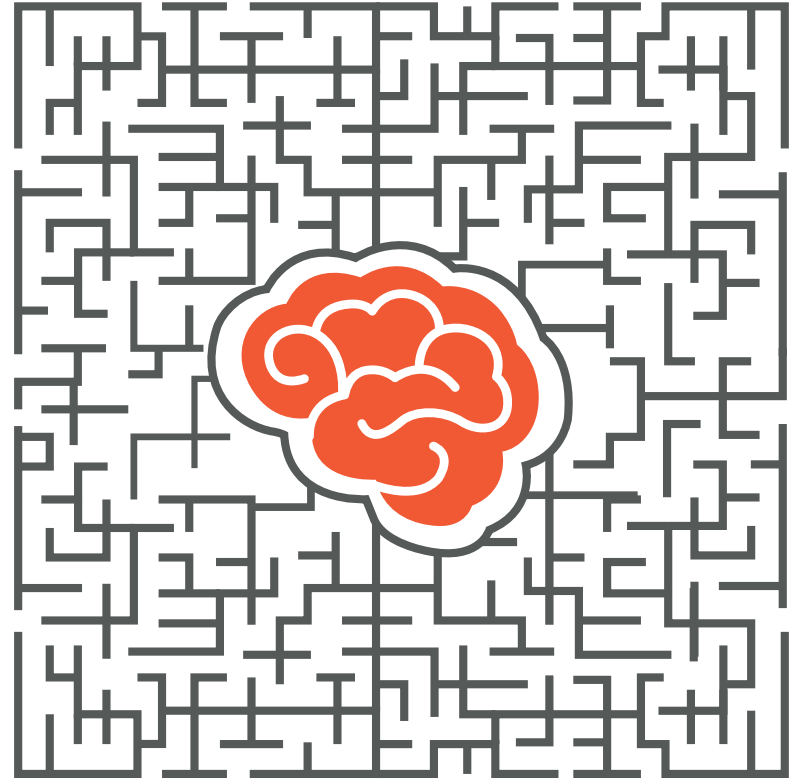# The Emotions
## That Make Marketing Campaigns Go Viral

# Intro

Let's assume you know the basics: **content marketing is one of the best ways to engage with audiences and potential customers online** It is useful for improving search rankings, increasing brand engagement and loyalty, increasing brand visibility, and encouraging social sharing and interaction. If you are a consumer-facing company in this day and age, you simply cannot keep up with the competition if you are not actively building your content marketing skill set.

When creating content campaigns, chances are, you are designing campaigns to reach specific demographics. Your client may be trying to appeal to Baby Boomer men or Millennial women, or some combination of Gen X'ers. No matter the targets, **a successful campaign begins with understanding your audience - and which emotions drive them each to like, share, and engage.** But, how well do you understand the impact of viral emotions, and the nuances between what drives different age groups and genders to share?

*The Emotions That Make Marketing Campaigns Go Viral*

# Methodology

In order to understand the best emotional drivers to use in the content we create, we looked at 50 of the top 100 images over a three month period from Imgur.com, as voted on Reddit.com (one of the top sharing sites in the world).

We then surveyed over 800 men and women between the ages of 18-54 to to find out which emotions each image activated for them, and how gender and age influenced a likelihood to share.

We used Robert Plutchik's comprehensive Wheel of Emotion as our categorization. We categorized these responses as falling in a range of positive, negative, or surprised (which could be either positive or negative reactions).

We correlated these responses to initial views and share rates, and found elements that were common in viral images for every demographic, as well as differences that could change your marketing approach. Here are our insights - and how to apply them.

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# Finding: Positive Emotions

Whether your goals are to grow an audience, develop more brand advocacy, or increase your organic search ranking, tapping into audience emotions is going to be an important part of your strategy. Why? High arousal emotions are what move an audience to care and share, building engagement for your brand.

Certain specific emotions were extremely common in highly viral content, while others were extremely uncommon. The top ten viral emotions included:

1. Amusement
2. Interest
3. Surprise
4. Happiness
5. Delight
6. Pleasure
7. Joy
8. Hope
9. Affection
10. Excitement

Across all ages and genders, study participants reported three common reactions to the group of viral images. First, viral images inspired inspired positive feelings. Feelings like joy, interest, anticipation, and trust all correlated highly with initial views. While initial views are not the same as sharing, it is important to note that content must first attract attention before it can be shared, and prompting positive feelings can be a strong ally in that endeavor.

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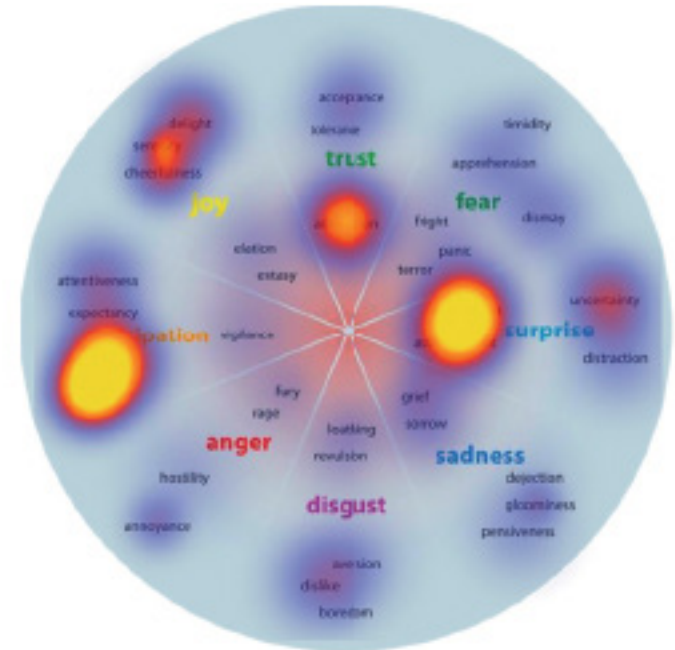
# Finding: Negative Emotions

Negative emotions were less commonly found in highly viral content than positive emotions, but viral success was still possible when negative emotion also evoked anticipation and surprise.

The bottom 10 emotions included:

1. Anger
2. Politeness
3. Frustration
4. Doubt
5. Embarrassment
6. Despair
7. Hurt
8. Guilt
9. Contempt
10. Shame

ANGER

FRUSTATION

DOUBT

GUILT

*The Emotions That Make Marketing Campaigns Go Viral*
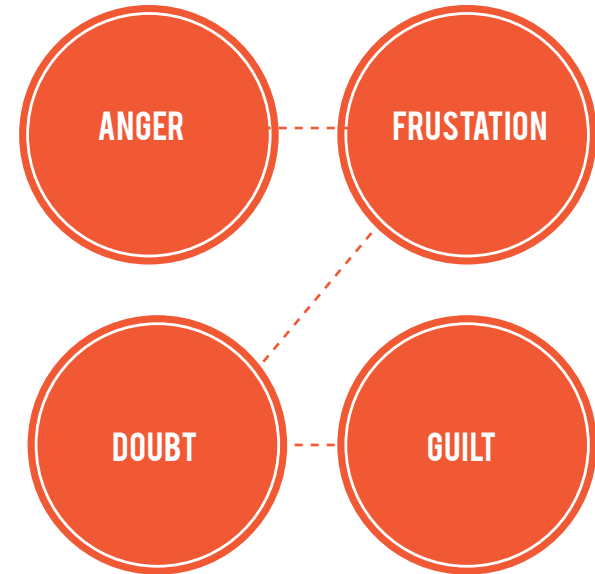
# Finding: Complex Emotions

Rather than only inspiring feelings of happiness or trust, some viral images inspired a range of feelings that were emotionally complex. This suggests that people are more willing to share content that offers more than a one-dimensional emotional experience.

**Interest, surprise, and amusement seemed to behave as emotional multipliers for positive emotions, and empathy seemed to act as an emotional multiplier for negative emotions.** The emotion of admiration was very commonly found in highly shared content, an unexpected result.

Contrasting emotions seemed to be helpful in increasing emotional impact. In the cases where negative emotions were present, they seemed to directly contrast positive emotions, likely enhancing the emotionality of the image through this contrast. Additionally, empathy seems to be a common emotion found alongside popular content that evokes strong negative emotions.

# Finding: Millennials

Millennials - those between the ages of 18-34 - reported fewer emotions related to surprise than their older counterparts. Because surprise was such a common element of viral images, this finding has important implications for trying to reach a younger audience: if they are less likely to be surprised, they may be less likely to view your content.

One theory on this result is that Millennials are oversaturated by the type of static images we used for this study, making them more challenging to surprise via this medium. If that is the case, marketers will need to find more angles to reach this group, including more dynamic and new media types.

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# Finding: Genders

The results of this study showed that men and women responded largely the same when it came to their emotional reactions to viral images. There were, however, some nuances that could give marketers an edge:

**Men** reported a slightly smaller range of emotional reactions than women, but more joyful feelings when viewing viral images. Keeping in mind that positive emotions are key to initial views, but a variety of emotions must be engaged to prompt sharing, marketers might consider how they can incorporate elements to activate feelings in addition to joy to increase sharing among men.

**Women** reported slightly more negative emotions and greater emotional complexity than men, but statistically more trust emotions. This might make women somewhat more likely to share, based on their propensity for feeling a range of emotions, and trust may be the strongest positive emotion to access in order to gain their initial views.

Through careful investigation of the elements of virality, **understanding your audience** and **the emotional drivers that motivate them**, you increase the odds that your content marketing campaigns will achieve viral success.
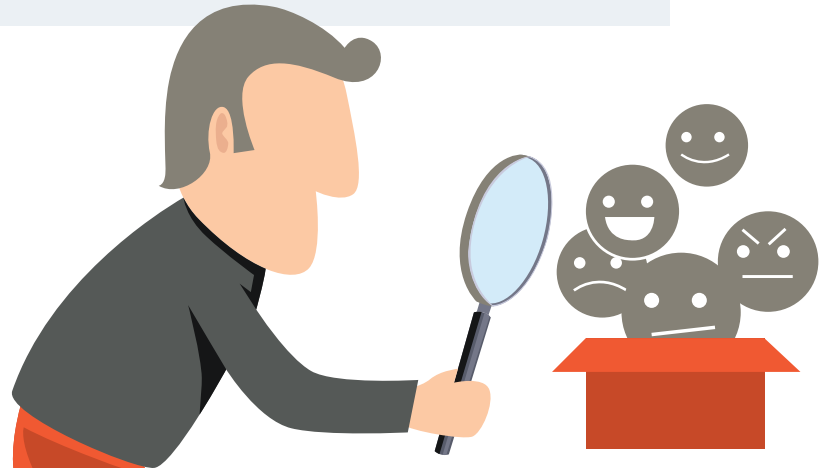
# Fractl

## We leverage the science behind great content.

Our Mission: To produce the **most engaging** and **emotional experiences** on the web.

Fractl is a full-service digital marketing agency that specializes in content marketing, social media, and lead generation. Fractl focuses on the high impact of viral content marketing as it relates to SEO, rankings, and online growth. Fractl is a team with a broad set of talents and skill sets. Most notably, we maintain a highly talented team of programmers, writers, editors, PR professionals, technical search engine talent, animators, graphic designers, project managers, producers, and creative thinkers. Find out how our superior results can increase your bottom line today.

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