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# I Heard it through the... Vine: A Look into Virality and its Importance

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Honors Thesis

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### I Heard it through the... Vine: A Look into Virality and its Importance

Six seconds. It seems unlikely that a story could be told within that short time frame. Likewise, people may doubt that viewers share a six-second story over and over until it becomes viral. But this process of virality is exactly what users of the social media outlet Vine attempt to achieve. Vine users create innovative content within a six-second video. These users then share their content with viewers in their online community. These Vines frequently display humorous qualities. But analyzing viral Vines suggests that other elements are essential to achieve viral Vines. How do Vine users make a viral Vine? And why does it even matter?

Vine is a video app that allows users to record, edit, and post six-second looping videos. In June 2012, Dom Hofmann, Rus Yusupov, and Colin Kroll created the Vine video app with the intent to “build a tool that would easily cut video shots together” (Honan). They desired to generate something new. This app would join YouTube and other video platforms, but would stand alone because of its unique features. While other social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram dominated the industry, the Vine creators also desired to incorporate a social element to their app. They accomplished the social aspect of Vine by integrating the ability for Vine users to share videos with others. Before Vine publicly launched, Twitter acquired it in October 2012. When Vine launched its free app in 2013, the app’s popularity quickly escalated. As of August 2015,

the Vine app had more than 200 million active users, with many Vine users—or Viners—attaining fame from their Vine videos.

A Vine video is mandatorily short—the time limit is six seconds. This six-second time frame is long enough for a brief story, but short enough to promote creativity. Originally, Vine was not intended to be so short; users were permitted an unlimited length of video. But when the co-founders' friends and testers had difficulties uploading their videos, they decided to change things up. Hofmann admitted, “We tried a bunch of different lengths—first five seconds, then 10 seconds, and some lengths in between. Eventually we realized that time wasn't really the problem” (Honan). They settled on six seconds—a file size small enough to share, but sufficient for a beginning, middle, and end. Once users became accustomed to the time limit, they began producing interesting content. The brevity of Vine videos challenges users to be innovative and memorable. To make a Vine go viral, Viners must demonstrate an understanding of their viewers and of the culture around them.

Perhaps the biggest awareness boost for Vine occurred right after the 2013 Boston Bombing. Doug Lorman taped NBC's television footage of the first bomb explosion on Boylston Street. He condensed the video to a six second snippet and shared the Vine video on Twitter. The Vine rapidly gained exposure. While horrifying, this video exposed and promoted Vine. Viewers learned about breaking news, while simultaneously discovering Vine. Bianca Bosker wrote a *Huffington Post* article, entitled “Vine in Boston: 6 Seconds of Horror, on Repeat.” In this piece, Bosker expands on Vine's relationship with the Boston attack. She explains, “Lorman's Vine video was a chilling, unrelenting vision of the moment of the bomb's impact. It zeroed in precisely on the

instant when everything changed, and played that instant on endless repeat” (Bosker). The mandated brevity of Vine videos compels users uploading Vines to pinpoint and relay only the essential facts. In the case of the Boston Bombing attack, the news organizations deemed the initial bomb explosion and the ensuing chaos to be the most important news to present to their audiences. With the succinct Vine, viewers quickly grasped the gravity of the attack.

While the six-second time limit is a trademark of Vine, the infinity looping feature of the app also characterizes Vine. Instead of coming to an expected conclusion, Vine videos repeat endlessly. Each jump back to the beginning of the video counts as a new loop. This looping feature was originally unplanned. In his interview with *Wired*, co-founder Dom Hofmann explained that the looping feature was designed to enhance the short videos, decreasing an “anticlimactic” feeling (Honan). The feature quickly caught on with Vine users. This unique characteristic distinguished Vine videos from other videos. The looping videos demanded attention. In July 2014, Vine introduced a loop count, which allows users to keep track of how many times a Vine loops. These loops help indicate the popularity of Vine videos (Kaplinskiy). Adaptions eventually had to be made to this update, due to a common problem: Vine videos left open on a phone or computer tab increased the number of loops. This increase of unwatched loops falsified information about the Vine and its views. Vine insists on its website that this problem was fixed when it put “systems in place to ensure the integrity of loop counts and prevent the number from being boosted with spammy tactics” (“Loops”). Vine remedied the situation by implementing measures that count only Vines visible in a browser or tab. This measure helps prevent attempts for a fixed viral video.

A high number of loops indicates a popular, viral Vine. Interestingly enough, as of January 24, 2016, the Vine with the highest loop count is a recording of the soccer stadium explosion during the 2015 Paris attacks (Waxman). This breaking news Vine currently holds a loop count of more than 500 million loops. Vine again demonstrated its ability to relay an important news story to users around the world. The brevity and looping of the video highlight to viewers the horror of the moment. The high number of views for news situations correlates with the demographics of Vine users. About seventy-one percent of Viners are millennials, with ages ranging from about eighteen to thirty-three years old (Smith). Millennials, and the rest of society, rely on their phones for practically everything from messages to social media notifications to news alerts. When important news needs to be distributed, organizations utilize Vine's succinct videos to alert their audiences. Vine videos perfectly fits their audience's fast-paced and easy access mentality.

Vine videos range in nature. As previously noted, breaking news videos are popular, while many sports and news organizations make frequent presences on Vine. But Vine holds a reputation for humorous videos. Certain Viners possess individual styles. These individual styles result in different categories of videos. These categories of Vine videos are changeable, often overlapping with each other. Vine recognizes the variety of videos and separates Vine videos into numerous channels. Some of these channels include comedy, gaming, music, and DIY. These channels feature Vine videos that share common themes and attributes. Similar to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, Vine employs hashtags to link trends and ideas. Hashtags aid users in finding similar videos, following trends, and notifying viewers about the content.

Vine users follow or subscribe to other Viners, trends, news, or whatever it is they are interested in. Viewers interested in hip hop dance trends can follow the Vine dance channel, or Viners known for their dance Vines. Viners often stay consistently within a genre. This consistency helps Viners gain loyal followers. With each new uploaded Vine video, Viners reward their followers with content that their viewers will enjoy. As with any continuous series or interaction, viewers learn more about the Viners they follow the more they watch. Specific references or inside jokes may be often repeated; familiarity with the Viners grows, promoting a sense of community and belonging. Viewers support Viners, who in turn reward their viewers with clips that the viewers will appreciate.

\* \* \*

While there are many types of Vine videos, the majority of Vines fit into four categories: practical jokes, attention-grabbing absurdity, catchphrases, and pop culture. Practical joke Vines don't stray far from the classic prank videos that most viewers are familiar with. These Vines contain a butt of the joke, the prankster, the viewer, and the means for the joke. Viners include their viewers in on the prank, inviting them to the "in" group—the superior pranksters. Vines in the attention-grabbing absurdity category rely on lures in the beginning seconds of the video to intrigue viewers. These lures, which grab the viewers' attention, are silly and absurd. The catchphrases category appropriately contains catchy phrases. These catchphrases are generally unfiltered, borderline annoying, reactions to a situation that Viners record and upload to Vine. The online community then repeats these phrases until they become a part of pop culture. Because

pop culture holds an important part in society, many Vines focus on it. Pop culture Vines include entertainment and entertainers. These comprise music, dance moves, movies, quotes, athletes, and celebrities. In this category, celebrity figures often prompt and popularize elements of pop culture—dance moves, songs, etc. Their fan base and audience then mimics and repeats the content until it emerges as a trend. Some Vines prominently display elements of just one category, while others fit into multiple categories. Let it be understood that these categories are my own determination. There are Vines that focus on more serious content like news, art, or professional dance choreography that I have purposely chosen to disregard for the purposes of my paper.

The majority of practical joke Vines include an inside secret between the viewer and the Viner, the items required for the joke, and an unsuspecting victim. Vine pranks do include common practical jokes, like whipped cream in the face, pulling chairs from underneath people, or whoopee cushions on a seat. But many Viners upgrade these jokes. They come up with recurring themed practical jokes. Viewers look forward to the next practical joke in a certain theme. Viners might add dramatic music to heighten viewer suspense or initiate certain emotions. These Vines are forms of entertainment and distraction. Practical jokes have always been performed to acquire laughter, whether the laughter is that of an audience or of the prankster. But these practical joke Vines are not meant to humiliate or intimidate.

Practical jokes are typically performed for someone's amusement. In Vine videos, both the Viner and the viewer experience amusement at the expense of the pranked victim. As mentioned before, Viners offer their viewers inside information about the approaching prank. Sometimes Viners hint at the type of practical joke in the first second

of the Vine. Viewers familiar with a Viner will recognize the build up or the setting. The viewers then follow along with the prankster as he or she completes the practical joke. When the joke concludes, the viewers feel that they have been involved in the entire process. They, along with the Viner, watch the victim react amusingly. But they do not risk anything while watching from a distance. Instead, the viewers get a good laugh and enjoy momentary distraction from daily obligations.

What is perhaps most effective about practical joke Vines is the bond that a viewer feels with the Viner. The Viner includes the viewer in the joke, welcoming him or her into the “in” group. This “in” group automatically assumes an air of superiority. At first look, the Viner leads this group. He or she decides the type of practical joke and the victim. The Viner develops the practical joke and puts it into action. By posting the video to the Vine community, the Viner then invites other users to join his or her group. However, the power dynamics shift when viewers are invited to join. Viewers choose the Viners they want to follow. They can leave the group whenever they desire; they do not have to loyally follow a Viner. Consequently, the Viner must come up with entertaining material that compels his or her viewers to stay with the group. When allowing the viewers to watch the practical joke, the Viner encourages viewers to participate and bond over the situation. If the Viner succeeds, he or she earns the loyalty of the viewers. The unified Viner and viewers then bond over the practical joke and the ensuing reaction of the practical joke victim.

Prank videos are almost always an instant viral hit. Vine is no exception. There are many Viners who specialize in daily sharing their pranks or practical jokes with their subscribers. For example, Thomas Sanders is one of the most watched Viners on Vine. At



twenty-seven years old, Sanders has achieved immense popularity with his comedy videos. He has established and mastered his Vine niche, with more than seven million followers to prove it. His repertoire of Vines includes Disney and Pokémon themed pranks with friends, Narrating People's Lives (in which he narrates the lives of strangers around him), and even videos addressing social issues in a funny way. In his themed pranks, Sanders terrorizes his group of friends by singing or quoting bits of Disney or Pokémon script, while pulling a prank associated with the words. For example, in one Vine, he puts ice cubes down a friend's shirt while singing, "the cold never bothered me anyway" from *Frozen* ("Disneypranks"). While practical jokes require an unsuspecting butt of the joke, in Sanders' case, many of the victims exist within his friend group. Sanders might use his friends as victims to lessen or avoid criticism about pranking strangers. However, using his friends as victims does not diminish the effect of Sanders' practical joke. Sanders manages to catch his friends by surprise (even though sometimes his friends expect the joke). The friend victim reacts amusingly, causing both Sanders and his viewers to laugh.

In practical joke Vines, the Viner almost always pushes the boundaries of polite behavior. It is common for a prankster to invade personal space, interrupt conversations or daily happenings, or trick both strangers and friends alike. In all of these situations, the Viner must be willing to take the risk and responsibility for the reaction. For instance, in one of Sanders' Narrating People's Lives videos, he narrates the actions of a pizza deliveryman. The deliveryman is approaching the door of a house, with his back facing Sanders. Sanders begins making up a story about him. The deliveryman, caught by surprise, drops his pizzas on the ground. The end of the Vine shows Sanders with the

deliveryman, saying, “I have to pay you. I am so sorry” (“Narrating”). Although the deliveryman doesn’t seem too disgruntled, Sanders takes full responsibility. While this particular joke begins as a verbal joke, the humorous event that Sanders causes with his story results in a more physical comedy. The outcome of this joke demonstrates how frequently practical jokers do indeed disregard expected social behaviors.

Constraints are temporarily lifted in practical joke Vines. Viners behave freely and ridiculously. They endorse the idea of enjoying the spontaneous and funny moments in life—in opposition to the expectations of social behavior. Western society follows an often unspoken set of rules. People aren’t supposed to smear other people in the face with handfuls of whipped cream. It isn’t proper. Yet, ironically, through joking and the response of laughter, practical joke Vines appease social and popular demands. Pranks interrupt the mediocre daily activities that humans regularly or mechanically perform. These Vines offer a release and revitalization. Viewers can take breaks from their daily activities and enjoy brief seconds (or if they so desire, hours) of amusement. Practical joke Vines divert and entertain the viewer, permitting them to likewise take part in amusing situations.

The next category encompasses attention-grabbing Vines. One could argue that the majority of videos on Vine are attention grabbing. In order for any video to gain popularity, it must contain an intriguing aspect. But the next category of Vine videos focuses on more stupid, oddly funny elements—or attention-grabbing absurdity. As with any Vine video, these absurd videos monopolize on Vine’s six-second time limit. The Viner must capture the interest of the viewers immediately and keep their attention. Thus the subject matter, plot, joke, or person in the video must be memorable. Attention-

grabbing—or viral—Vines possess tempting lures. These lures are bizarre and surprising. They contrast with the expectation of normalcy that viewers hold. These lures frequently target the five senses of the viewers. Odd noises or eye-catching visual effects serve as excellent lures. Viewers intrinsically expect more realistic portrayals, scenes, and outcomes. When confronted with the absurd situations, viewers undergo a conflict of expectations. The unexpected absurdity surprises viewers, compelling them to wonder what will happen next. This contrast between realistic expectations and absurd outcomes prompts continued watching. The juxtaposition creates intrigue.

Viners use the remaining seconds of the video to conclude their stories, ideas, or moments. The remainder of the Vine varies depending on the Vine creator. The continued narrative often contains more surprises, but it can also provide an explanation or conclusion to the lure. Sometimes Vines feature a flowing plot, while others simply depict a seemingly carefree incident. Viners can purposely mislead their viewers. They accomplish this misdirection by limiting what their viewers see. In contrast to practical jokes that include viewers in on the joke, Vines in this category purposely keep the viewers in confusion and curiosity. Viners do not explain their content, opting for a more elusive approach. Viners using this mysterious approach risk engaging their viewers. However, true Vine masters manage to appeal to their viewers, while maintaining an enigmatic persona. The more carefree types of attention-grabbing Vines don't necessarily adhere to these aforementioned descriptions. Instead, they capture the absurd, spontaneous moments of life. These types of absurd attention-grabbing Vines still lure viewers and grab their attention; however, they forego a planned plot and outcome, opting to let the spontaneity of the situation work for itself.

Once the viewers confront the absurd lure and situation, they transition to a reaction stage. If the viewers are truly intrigued by the absurd attention-grabbing Vine, they will continue to watch multiple loops. Perhaps repeated watching of the Vine will reveal to the viewers an explanation of events. Sometimes viewers enjoy a video more knowing the series of events that leads to the ending. Viewers repeatedly watching a video can also get more confused or exasperated, especially if they are unable to figure out how a Viner accomplishes a stunt or event. However, because Vine is a digital platform, most Vine viewers understand that elusive visual effects correlate with the technological ease of use and access. Of course, not all Vines in this category depend on visual effects. Ultimately, the popularity and ultimate virality of a Vine depends on the reaction of the viewers. Similar to practical joke Vines, most Viners share Vines in the attention-grabbing absurdity category more for their enjoyment and entertainment factors. It doesn't seem that Viners share these types of Vines with an underlying desire to instigate certain thoughts or ideas. In fact, the majority of attention-grabbing Vines seek viral success and fame. Viners who successfully lure their viewers gain popularity.

One particular Viner excels in attention-grabbing videos—Zach King. Twenty-six-year old King specializes in producing “magic” Vines. In these Vines, King follows a simple plot line, depicting small stories or moments. But King uses the easy recording function of the Vine app to baffle his viewers. He edits recorded shots together to perform magic, or the illusion of magic. The resulting Vines seamlessly work together to mystify and intrigue viewers. King's Vines often possess comedic elements. The humor of his Vines emerges from the incongruity of the viewers' realistic expectations with the absurd outcome. For instance, in one of King's videos, he and a group of friends are

sitting on the street curb drinking frozen drinks. King takes a sip of his drink and then cries out, “Ah, brain freeze!” He proceeds to scramble on the ground, where he repeatedly hits one ear. With each of King’s hits, ice cubes fall from his other ear onto the street (King). The absurdity of this video stems from King’s literal translation of a brain freeze. Most viewers can empathize with the discomfort of a brain freeze. But the expectations of the viewers for getting rid of brain freezes (like simply scrunching their faces in pain) differ from King’s trick of literally hitting the frozen drink out of his head. Unless viewers are accustomed to King’s style, viewers expect to see a realistic scene. Instead, they encounter a surreal and absurd situation. The surprising and absurd elements of this video steal the attention of the viewer, resulting in more loop views. The intrigue of the video comes with the juxtaposition of the expected with the unexpected—the normal and the absurd.

Another example of attention-grabbing absurdity is the Duck Army Vine. This video remains one of the most watched Vines. The popular video was originally posted by Kevin Synnes; however, it was not a Vine video. Viner Charlie Murphy cut an excerpt from Synnes’ video to fit Vine’s time slot. He then uploaded it to Vine, where it began its climb to virality. This Vine deviates from a set plot line, focusing on the more spontaneous, carefree moment. The video begins with Kevin Synnes squeezing a solo rubber duck located in a shopping cart. The rubber duck emits a loud bellow. Synnes then pushes against the rubber ducks underneath the original duck. The “duck army” boisterously (and quite humorously) bellows in unison (Murphy). Rubber ducks alone probably wouldn’t be enough to grab viewers’ attention. But the sounds in this video complete the Vine. Viewers consider the solitary rubber duck to be amusing. The duck’s

cry is unexpected and entertaining. This sound alone piques the curiosity of the viewers. Their curiosity is further increased when the viewers see the hand going to push the duck again. But the real surprising humor comes when the rest of the “duck army” joins in the cry with loud enthusiasm. The absurdity of this army of rubber ducks uttering a battle cry grabs and holds the attention of the viewers. Viewers laugh at the unexpected absurdity. And, if the Viner succeeds with the lure, the viewers will watch the Vine again to laugh again, figure the tricks out, or simply enjoy the weirdness.

Catchphrases form the next category of Vines. To say that catchphrases are catchy sounds obvious and redundant. However, these types of Vines rely on their memorable phrases. In contrast to the planned setting of practical joke Vines, catchphrases spawn from more spontaneous moments. The scene is not set up. Instead, a Viner manages to capture a verbal reaction to a situation on video. Sometimes the person reacting is the actual Viner, while other Vines feature other people in the videos. Regardless of who reacts, the resulting catchphrase is unfiltered and often annoying. A Viner uploads a catchphrase video to Vine. The online community then mimics and repeats the phrase until it becomes popularized. Eventually, if successful, the catchphrase emerges in pop culture society.

Catchphrases present a slight dichotomy. Above all else, catchphrases must be memorable. The looping quality of Vine helps to initiate the popularity of a phrase, due to its characteristic repetitiveness. Viewers can't help but recall a phrase that they've heard repeated numerous times. Memorable catchphrases must exhibit distinctive qualities. These phrases need to stand out. Something about the phrase must appeal to viewers. The vocal intonation of a spoken phrase commonly instigates listener memory.

The lilt of the speaker's voice possesses an individual style. However, this individual style invites repetition because it is so distinct. Thus, the phrase moves from unique to imitable. A phrase worthy of repetition must also be easy enough for imitators to remember and copy. The distinct factor of the phrase helps imitators with repetition. But the length of a catchphrase must cater to its viewers or listeners. Shorter catchphrases allow for easier memory and repetition. So catchphrases simultaneously contain unique qualities and imitable qualities.

While imitation and repetition correlate with any type of Vine category, they particularly resonate with catchphrases. People unconsciously imitate and mimic others. Mirroring—subconsciously mimicking the acts of another—showcases the human tendency to copy. People take social cues from others around them and apply them to their own gestures or words. Sometime people imitate those they perceive to be successful or popular. By repeating these popular words, moves, or ideas, imitators seek similar success. Sometimes people imitate to express appreciation. For example, a Vine viewer finds a phrase funny. The viewer deems the Viner's intonation and line delivery to be impeccable. Because this viewer likes the phrase so much, he or she wants to mimic it. The viewer repeats the phrase, sharing his or her liking and appreciation for it. Others who have watched this Vine and share a similar liking to the phrase recognize the phrase when the imitator repeats it. The two form a connection by repeating the phrase together. Perhaps they see who can master the phrase better. Or perhaps they apply the phrase to various activities and situations. The two imitators communicate through the Vine catchphrase. The phrase becomes a shared interest. Shared interest allows for deep

discussions, good impressions, or new relationships. These results are so important because people inherently desire to be socially accepted and to fit in.

This desire to be accepted or to show off for an audience reveals itself in the popular catchphrase, “Do it for the Vine.” In this Vine, an older woman urges a little girl to do a dance in front of the camera. The lady chants “Do it for the Vine.” The little girl sassily responds to the woman, “I ain’t gonna do it” (Dom). The intonation of both the woman and girl’s voice is memorable and easy to mimic, especially since the phrases are frequently repeated. It comes as little surprise that “Do it for the Vine” quickly catapulted to a new go-to phrase. Doing it for the Vine implied that “it” would become popular in the online community. Viners looking to record certain stunts mimicked the phrase. This catchphrase demonstrates the importance for Viners to capture just the right joke or act at just the right time for just the right audience. The audience consumes, processes, and then repeats the phrase until it becomes integral in societal conversation.

For a strong example of a popularized catchphrase, look no further than the #DamnDaniel trend. On February 15, 2016, Josh Holz posted a video to his Twitter account. In this video, Holz complimented his friend and fellow schoolmate Daniel Lara on his attire. In a memorable voice, Holz repeats “Damn Daniel” each time he sees Daniel. Occasionally, Holz adds more to his phrase: “Damn Daniel! Back at it again with the white Vans.” The thirty-second video quickly spread and became a trend on Vine. The original video was cut to fit the six-second time limit, but it did not lose its charm. Viners parodied the video, while the original video continued to gain popularity. The popularity of the phrase has catapulted within the recent months. Imitators can use the phrase to relay an element of surprise or appreciation. It is almost a substitute for



applause. People don't even need to stick to the original phrase. Imitators can rework the phrase, adapting it to fit in with their peculiar situations. But, as is the case with all catchphrases, the intonation of the voice must be mimicked "on fleek," or perfectly, in order to obtain the same effect.

The last Vine category, pop culture, feeds on the growth of new trends in popular culture. While pop culture generally includes a multitude of categories within itself, I have chosen to limit my pop culture category to entertainment. Entertainment comprises dance moves, music, television, movies, and sports. Each year brings new hit songs, dance moves, favorite quotes, and rising athletes and celebrities. And each year, these elements mix together to form new trends. The process for these pop culture Vines often begins with a celebrity figure. A celebrity popularizes something—a song, dance move, word, or idea. The celebrity's fan base imitates the celebrity, until a new trend emerges. The audience expands from the original fan base to others active in the online community. The viewers then mimic and parody the new trend. These parodies imitate the popular celebrity, but also relocate the celebrity into situations more familiar to viewers. These pop culture Vines invite a range of viewers, which prompts their rapid popularity.

Pop culture trends merge into mainstream society. People desire to be socially accepted and to fit in. Those who know the recent trends are more likely to fit in with mainstream culture. A mainstream person, according to Urban Dictionary (the online dictionary defined by the online community), "jumps from trend to trend so that they fit in with the rest of the crowd" ("Mainstream"). They exhibit the traits that pop culture society expects in people. Certainly not all Vine users who mimic pop culture Vines

crave to fit in or gain popularity. Some Viners mock pop culture trends through parody, while others mimic them to display their personal opinion about the trends. Whatever the motivation for imitation, it cannot be denied that pop culture Vines develop and spread rapidly.

Take, for example, Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton and the dabbing trend. For those unfamiliar with this popular trend, dabbing is a dance move that looks like the dancer is sneezing into one elbow, while the dancer simultaneously extends the opposite arm. It is a quick motion, and can be repeated multiple times. While the dance move originated in the hip-hop scene, Cam Newton popularized this move when he performed it during his touchdown celebrations. In fact, if one begins typing “Cam Newton” into the Google search bar, Google lists “Cam Newton dab” as an option. Dabbing quickly escalated, becoming the subject of newscasters, sports casters, how-to videos, and Vine videos. Taylor Jones and Armand Valdes expand on the dab dance move in their *Mashable* article “Everyone will be dabbing this weekend, so you should probably know what it is.” The authors summarize how the dabbing trend grew, and how Cam Newton influenced this growth:

Led by quarterback Cam Newton, the Carolina Panthers have thrashed opponents all season, and in the process, joined in on the fun of the Internet’s latest dance craze – the dab... Naturally, the dance made its way to social media, where people all over the country shared Vines and videos of themselves hitting the dab. (Jones)

This article emphasizes the “natural” result of trends obtaining social media virality.

People everywhere began dabbing and sharing their videos online. Naturally, the trend

grew on social media until it became common in popular culture. It seems that a Viner's desire for fame—or to be socially accepted in his or her own community—underlies these types of pop culture Vines. The community may be online, in school, or in a hockey stadium during intermission when the camera focuses on the group of middle school boys. But pop culture Vines require the inclination to imitate that is essential for catchphrases. Imitating these trends allows viewers to feel part of a community.

Each of these Vine categories—some more than others—prompt imitations, parodies, remixes, and shares. Vines that are shared enough go viral. Viral Vines require something that resonates with viewers, helping them stand out from the other millions of videos available on the Internet. If a Vine resonates with its viewers, it is more likely to achieve virality. Virality, according to Oxford Dictionaries, means “the tendency of an image, video, or piece of information to be circulated rapidly and widely from one Internet user to another; the quality or fact of being viral” (“Virality”). In order for a video to go viral, it must make an impact on its audience. But what makes a viral Vine?

\* \* \*

Virality acknowledges the creativity or innovation of Viners and their videos. Virality leads to fame and achievement, accomplishments that many Viners long for. Viners with viral Vines gain more followers, more views, and more popularity. Virality changes Viner lives, granting opportunities and connections. While some Viners achieve viral Vines through pure luck, many know and employ certain elements that assist in the road to virality.

Numerous online resources give advice on creating a viral Vine. The popular wikiHow site is no exception. The site contains articles and advice on an endless range of topics. One article called “How to Get a Lot of Likes on Vine” lists and describes fourteen steps to make a Vine stand out. wikiHow breaks these fourteen steps into two parts—Making Good Vines and Being Involved in the Vine Community. The first of wikiHow’s steps suggests that Viners look for good concepts and ideas. Video themes, topics, or trends vary and evolve, so wikiHow recommends looking at Vine’s “Popular Now” section to view up-and-coming trends. The site advises, “The key is to take the seemingly ordinary and improve upon it with skillful artistic abilities or clever commentary” (“How to Get”). Wit and skill go a long way with Vine videos. As with any piece of work, Viners should pinpoint a specific audience. Because most Viners are millennials, wise Viners cater to that audience by including pop culture references. The how-to continues with advice to “be entertaining” and “provide the right commentary” (“How to Get”). The site also recommends that Viners use hashtags to link videos and themes and employ technical skills for cutting clips together. The remaining steps guide Viners to frequently post to Vine, network within the Vine community, upload timely videos, and share, share, share.

Sharing is an essential aspect with Vine, or with any online content. When viewers share content with their online communities, they express and display opinions about the piece. Perhaps the video or image made the viewers happy, inspired, angry, nostalgic, or sad. Users may wish to demand change, help a friend, or share an inspiring story. Emotional responses, triggers, and connections promote sharing. Thus, viewer emotions take an essential part in a Vine’s road to virality. In his work *Memes in Digital*

*Culture*, Limor Shifman describes the impact of human emotion with Internet culture. Shifman articulates, “Since Internet users share for both social and self-presentation purposes, they prefer spreading content that makes others feel good and at the same time reflects on themselves as upbeat and entertaining” (Shifman 66-67). Much of social media is a façade of what each user wishes his or her friends or followers to see. Face to face interaction rarely occurs in online communities. Sharing is sometimes the only form of communication between users and their followers. Users post and share content that endorses a certain representation of themselves. While some sharing is controlled, it does allow users to express their interests. Users share content that they care about. Viewers who care or relate to content want to share it with others. The cycle continues, until enough people spread the content to the point of virality.

Sharing not only results in virality, but it also propagates video remixes. An important part of the Vine community comprises variations and remakes of popular Vines. An original Vine that goes viral obviously resonates with its viewers. Viewers frequently respond with remixes of the video. These remixes communicate to others a Viner’s connection with the subject matter. Shifman notes how the act of reproducing of video forms a “shared bond... a sense of membership in a privileged brotherhood” (28). Viewers who experienced a similar reaction to the Vine immediately connect. And connection seems to be what most online social media users desire.

Both original Vines and remixes can achieve virality. Without the invention of the original work, sharing and remixes don’t follow. When this original video spreads, remixes of the original video emerge. Remixes might contain soundtracks, names, or situations different than their inspirations. But the essence of the original videos stays the

same. Remixes hint at individual viewer interpretations of the video, life, emotions, or ideologies. (Shifman 43). These recreations adulate and honor the original, while also promoting individual thought, interpretation, and expression. Shifman recognizes the influence of sharing remixes in online communities:

By referencing [a particular video], users simultaneously indicate and construct their individuality and their affiliation with the larger community. Re-creating popular videos and images can thus be seen as the cultural embodiment of ‘networked individualism’: it allows people to be ‘themselves,’ together. (34)

Remixes showcase individual expression, while also promoting popularity of the original Vine. The idea of sharing becomes almost cyclical and paradoxical. An original Vine is the first of its kind—the pioneer. If the original succeeds, other Viners make their own new Vines—but with borrowed material. Can these remixes then be original? Remixes are sometimes funnier than the original Vine. They often receive just as much popularity as the original. But these offspring would be pointless and misunderstood without the foundation of the original idea. Remixes add new layers to ideas, themes, and trends. But to properly appreciate the remixes, viewers must familiarize themselves with the original. The original Vine acts as a key to understand the remixes.

There is no magic formula to create a viral Vine. But many factors repeatedly appear in viral Vine videos. As stated previously, wikiHow articulates that Vines spread when they contain original concepts, entertainment, and skillful editing. Vines require imitability. They must distinguish themselves from other Vines. Viners need to make videos distinctive enough so their viewers recognize references of general ideas. Yet,

Viners must also keep videos simple enough for viewers to imitate and recreate. Shifman likewise finds common features in popular YouTube videos, which can be applied to Vine videos. While not every feature applies to every viral Vine, these factors are undeniably evident throughout the viral Vine repertoire.

Shifman points out that most popular videos focus on ordinary people (74). Viewers are more likely to respond to Vines that contain everyday people. Ordinary is familiar. These familiar characters could be high school students, a musician starting out in the industry, or a regular dad of two. Viewers easily understand these situations. Understanding leads to more viewer shares. More shares lead to viewer imitation and interpretations. Certainly, celebrity figures produce viral Vines. Celebrities have a large, loyal fan base that follows celebrity updates, news, and social media accounts. This celebrity content inevitably receives an abundance of views. But Shifman argues that ordinary, or user-generated, content results in more viewer response—shares and discussions (76). Viewers are more comfortable with ordinary people. In the case of Vine, ordinary situations or acts—not just people—draw viewers in. Additionally, ordinary acts and situations are easier for viewers to imitate.

Humor works in Vines. And Shifman recognizes the power of humor to make videos go viral. Viners can be intentionally and unintentionally humorous. With practical jokes, Viners aim for laughter. Attention-grabbing absurdity or catchphrases, on the other hand, may simply portray a bizarre situation or an overreaction. Oftentimes, parodies display humorous components. This humor could be more of a mocking humor, correlating with the superiority theory of laughter. Shifman notes that viewers may watch Vines to feel superior. He argues, “Some people enjoy not only watching videos of others

whom they perceive to be inferior, but also take pleasure in scornfully imitating them, thus publicly demonstrating their own superiority” (81). Viewers validate to themselves their own significance by laughing at people they deem to be inferior. Shifman also speaks of incongruous humor in popular videos. Juxtaposing two opposite ideas or objects produces humor. Viners may purposely merge opposites, recognizing the absurdity of the outcome, or they may luckily discover and record an incongruous moment. But no matter the method, if a Vine delivers humor, viewers more aptly respond.

Shifman suggests that whimsical content, simplicity, and repetition also lead to popular videos (83). This whimsical content could be anything from pure silliness, a bizarre situation, or a ridiculous outcome. But these whimsical elements invite viewer curiosity. Whimsical content seems to contest with ordinary elements that Vines also exhibit. However, this conflict often provides the incongruous bits within Vines. The unification of these two extremes results in amusing and imaginative Vines. While some Vines do address topics of more weight, like politics or religion, the majority of Vines tend toward a more lighthearted nature. Simplicity and repetition are also relevant to viral videos (81-82). These features are the backbone of Vine videos. As discussed earlier, the Vine time limit forces Viners to simplify the ideas they want to share. Simple content is easier for viewers to understand and imitate. If simple Vines frequently repeat, viewers more easily remember them. Repetition helps make a point; it also prompts further repetition in the form of imitation. By using these elements in a Vine, Viners broaden their audience and make memorable Vines.



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Shifman and wikiHow assert that Vines must possess simplicity, ordinariness, intrigue, original content, and a certain level of skill to prompt sharing and, consequently, virality. But do these features actually stand true for viral Vine videos? Do viral Vines need to demonstrate each of these requirements, or can they gain popularity with only a couple? The following section analyzes the content, viewer reception, and growth of three popular Vine trends: #DamnDaniel, #run, and #dancelikedrake. Each of these Vines reached viral status in the Vine community and in pop culture. Vine dedicates separate channels for these Vines and their subsequent remixes—the hashtags distinguish and link the trend.

The first example, #DamnDaniel, transcended the online community, breaking through into popular culture and everyday society. But why did this particular Vine catch on, when so many other Vines of students documenting their day-to-day activities exist? In correlation with Shifman's common features of popular videos, #DamnDaniel includes ordinary people. The commentator, Josh Holz, compliments his friend Daniel Lara, a fellow student. Practically every viewer understands the silliness and fun of friendship. The friends are likeable and unintimidating. Holz clearly enjoys himself when filming Daniel. Daniel, likewise, seems to enjoy the attention. Their enjoyment prompts a playful mood throughout the video. Holz's frequent utterance of "Damn Daniel" teeters on the edge of amusing and annoying. Thus, the humor of this video emerges either from viewers laughing with the two friends or laughing at the two friends. Many viewers responded positively to the phrase and its undeniable attraction. Other viewers who felt

superior to Holz and Lara laughed at the annoying stupidity or Vans-vanity they perceived in the video. Regardless, both types of viewers repeated the phrase—in appreciation, or in mockery.

Probably the most notable aspects of #DamnDaniel are imbedded in the simplicity and repetitiveness of the video. It has already been determined that #DamnDaniel evolved into a popular catchphrase. This evolution is due to the fact that the phrase is so simple and easy to remember. Viewers cannot forget the sound of Holz repeating “Damn Daniel.” The phrase acts as an identifier. It gets stuck in the viewers’ heads, begging to be repeated. Holz’s unique voice stands out, but is also easy to mimic. Many companies, including Vans, made use of the phrase in marketing. Musicians put the phrase to tunes, prompting various Trap, House, and Electronic Dance Music (EDM) remixes. The phrase itself asserted itself as a common term of applause. Without the distinct voice of Holz and the simplicity and repetition of the phrase, the video would not have been as successful.

And #DamnDaniel certainly succeeded. The video propelled Holz and Lara to almost immediate fame. Their lives changed because of the popularity of their video. Only days after their video surfaced, Holz and Lara appeared on the Ellen DeGeneres Show. During the show, Ellen gifted Holz with a surfboard and Daniel with a lifetime supply of Vans shoes. Vans also offered Daniel commercial and modeling opportunities. He and Holz even visited a children’s hospital in California, where they gave away free Vans to patients. In addition to gaining Internet fame, Holz and Lara can brag about generating a social phenomenon.

The next Viral Vine example is #run. This Vine features the intense song of the same title by AWOLNATION. The song by itself is not of extreme noteworthiness. It

contains epic electronic sound, with lyrics that haunt. Jon Mala combined this song with his Vine video. This Vine shows beach umbrellas tearing across the sand while people run away. The Vine's caption adds to the drama of the video stating, "mankind stands no chance #run" (Mala). The humor of the #run Vine comes through the juxtaposition of the ridiculous situation with the intense song and lyric. This Vine mimics a horror story. The people on the beach run away from the chasing umbrellas, with accompanying dramatic music that urges the listener to run. The beat drops perfectly in time with the "run" lyric. The timing and word together allow for a climactic build that fits perfectly within the six seconds allotted for Vine videos. The Vine quickly escalated into a hilarious Vine trend.

Vines in the #run trend are almost always adaptations on horror stories. These remixes depict something facing a fearful or dangerous situation. Perhaps a dog runs away from its owner upon hearing that it's time to go to the vet. Other stories may feature an older brother running away from his younger sister after breaking her Barbie doll. The climax of these Vines arrives with the "run" lyric. Another #run remix, uploaded by Lance210, features a group of teenage guys ding-dong ditching a house. Right when one of the guys rings the doorbell, he looks at the camera and says, "Run." The guys run away from the house, trying not to get caught. They race down the front stairs, but one prankster trips and falls during his escape. In a classic horror movie move, the homeowner drags him by the feet toward the house. The song "Run" plays in the background, perfectly coinciding with the ding-dong ditcher's verbal command.

One of the most intriguing bits of this #run remix is the completely serious face of the prankster who rings the doorbell. His serious attitude contrasts with the fun and joking nature of ding-dong ditching. The viewer doesn't expect to be presented with an

unsmiling face. The extreme song that plays reinstates the serious theme of the video. When one of the jokers falls to the ground during his escape, viewers immediately recognize that something bad will occur. Instead of a happy ending for the joke, the group of pranksters experiences a casualty. This unexpected ending presents an incongruous element to the video. Viewer expectation for a fun practical joke collides with the horror element of being caught and dragged away. Viewers laugh at this collision. While the #run trend may not be as popular outside the online community as #DamnDaniel, a variety of remixes do exist. Viners implemented creative horror story ideas with the common element of “Run.” These quirky horror stories correlate with Shifman’s idea of whimsical content that prompts viral content. And, once again, the simplicity of the #run trend factors in to the success of these Vines.

The last example demonstrates how the combination of a popular song and various responses to the original video results in virality and subsequent social influence. It seems paradoxical to say that something can be original, when it possesses or displays old material. However, #dancelikedrake Vines expertly relate fresh takes on borrowed material. On October 19, 2015, the singer Drake released his music video for his popular song, “Hotline Bling.” The song was a success before the music video. But the release of the music video stimulated an even bigger effect. Sarah Ribacoff notes the song’s popularity in her *Odysey* article entitled, “The ‘Hotline Bling’ Epidemic.” Ribacoff mentions how “Hotline Bling” was a “cultural phenomenon that [swept] the nation, especially after Drake released the music video” (Ribacoff). The song pumped everybody up in the clubs, played almost incessantly on the radio, and easily got caught in the listener’s head. But it was Drake’s dancing in the video that enthralled his viewers. The

majority of the music video features Drake dancing alone, crooning about how his ex “used to call [him] on [his] cellphone.” Drake’s moves are amusing, yet oddly appealing. Jackie Willis from *Entertainment Tonight Online* articulates about Drake’s moves in her article “Drake Dances All by Himself in ‘Hotline Bling’ Music Video.” She writes, “The 28-year-old rapper debuts a series of meme-worthy moves, including the solo salsa. Between Drake and Kanye West, dancing alone is becoming quite the trend in hip-hop” (Willis). Willis uses the words “meme-worthy moves” to describe Drake’s dancing, and she does not misspeak. The rise of Drake’s dancing epitomizes pop culture and its influence.

The days after the music video release experienced an influx of reactions and responses to Drake’s solo dance moves in the video. Social media immediately filled with parodies and remixes of the video, while news organizations and magazines wrote about both the video and the feedback from Drake’s audience. While many people admitted Drake’s dancing was unique, most of the reviews had positive things to say. Kara Brown from *The Muse* wrote an article called “Drake Is the Biggest Dork in Hip Hop and He Knows It.” In this article, Brown gives Drake credit for his ability to win over his audience, even with his cheesy dancing:

Drake trusts himself, his talent and his palate enough to throw a song or a dumb motto out into the crowd and wait for us all to fall in line because yeah, when you give it a minute it *is* pretty counterintuitively dope... The beauty of Drake’s formula is that once everyone gets on board with his silly dancing and owl-branded sweatshirts, the dorkiness of it all is no

longer noticeable. Because if he's a big dork, then so are all of us dancing along with him. (Brown)

With these words, Brown recognizes and acknowledges Drake's "silly dancing." She also understands that people readily follow new trends. Brown foresaw Drake's dancing as one of these upcoming fads, regardless of how dorky it might seem at first. Essentially, Brown realized the tendency for viral videos to influence society.

Kara Brown was not the only one who saw this video as an opportunity to influence. Director X, the director of the "Hotline Bling" music video, wanted to inspire men to dance with this video. In an interview with *Tech Insider*, Director X said he and Drake purposely recorded the music video on a minimalist set (Mulshine). The purpose for minimalism was that Drake's dancing would not be overwhelmed. The minimalist effect would make more of an impression. And Director X was looking for an impression. He knew that to make a viral video, something had to stand out. He admitted in the interview, "But now, you need to think about it, because you have to do more than have [the video] look good and have it be a good song to get people outside of your fan base involved" (Mulshine). With Director X's direction, Drake's memorable dance moves, and sharing on all types of social media outlets, the video successfully reached millions of people outside Drake's normal audience. Director X and Drake aspired to make men dance. They succeeded—even if some of their accomplishment does take the form of parody.

As mentioned before, the "Hotline Bling" music video stars Drake in empty rooms, dancing alone. The remixes and parodies that followed the original video stemmed from the same video. While the original video did not begin on Vine, it did not

take long for Viners to share their takes on the video. Many of the remixes were responses to other remixes. They fed off of each other, often using the same clip of video—translated different ways. For example, one remix posted by Sunny Peabody edited the video clip so that Drake holds a box of pepperoni pizza. He throws the pepperoni onto a pizza in front of him—all in time with the music from the music video. The Vine then transitions to a screen showing “CALL 800PIZZABLING FOR FREE DELIVERY” (Sunny). With this text mimicking “Hotline Bling,” the video clearly parodied the music video. Other Vines followed. Drake was soon playing tennis, fighting with a light saber, dribbling a basketball, and throwing PokéBalls. These parodies and remixes were fresh responses using borrowed material. They reworked the celebrity figure of Drake into more normal situations that viewers were familiar with. Viners hashtagged their remixes with #dancelikedrake, allowing others to enjoy the various adaptations. Many of the remixes demonstrated similarities with each other. Many of the Viners took their ideas from each other—an online community formed because of shared interactions and interests. These remixes soon spread from Vine into other social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), inducing a #dancelikedrake frenzy. Drake’s simple and repetitive dancing, the whimsical content, and intrigue of a celebrity projected these Vines to virality.

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I found that there are repeating factors that help a Vine video go viral. Something that is ordinary contains relatable material, situations, or people. Ordinary things aren’t

really anything special, simply part of a routine. While it's nothing to be looked down on, ordinariness doesn't tend to grab someone's attention. Many successful Vines feed off of this idea of ordinariness. The success of ordinariness hints at a contrast of ideals. In order for a Vine to become viral, it must contain something more than ordinary. It must be special. But to appeal to an everyday audience, the video must present the façade of normalcy. An average viewer is unfamiliar with the lifestyle of a celebrity. By consuming media and tabloids, people glimpse into this lifestyle, but this perspective is incomplete and flawed. People expect more from celebrity figures—better quality, easier success, committed fans and followers. Many viewers idolize celebrity figures and the perception of fame and success. Subsequently, viewers may feel inadequate, unable to imitate a seemingly flawless celebrity. However, viewers often bypass this feeling of incompetency by transferring celebrity figures into ordinary scenes.

In contrast, everyday people tend to live their lives according to their own expectations—work hard for quality, success, and fans. Thus, ordinary viewers respond to ordinary elements that they are familiar with in the videos they watch. Perhaps the situation is a commonplace activity, like school or grocery shopping. Perhaps the people in the videos are ordinary—students or parents. But there must be some ordinary element to the video that a viewer can latch onto and respond to. Otherwise, the video is not pertinent to the viewer.

Each of the previous examples exhibits ordinary elements. The #DamnDaniel video follows two ordinary teenagers documenting their regular day-to-day experiences at school. The original #run Vine and its remixes involve normal people at the beach or pulling a prank. Even the #dancelikedrake videos, which feature Drake (obviously a



celebrity), contain aspects of ordinariness. And it is the ordinary aspect of Drake's video that has been the most successful—his dancing. In his video, Drake does not boast excellent dancing skills that make his viewers envious. Instead, his audience can either relate to his humorous awkward dancing or laugh at it. The remixes of "Hotline Bling" enhance this idea of normalcy by placing the dancing Drake into situations that his viewers are familiar with.

To capture the attention of an audience, a video must possess intrigue. The curiosity and interest of the viewer needs to be piqued by the contents of the video. Without some sort of lure, a video will fail to generate interest from an audience. Social media tempts viewers with a plethora of stories, pictures, and videos to view. Thus, a Vine needs to compel the viewer to stop scrolling down and choose to watch it instead. With only six seconds in Vine videos, Viners have less pressure to captivate viewers for a long amount of time (most viewers don't mind taking only a few seconds to watch a video). However, if the Viner would like to snag that viewer as a future viewer, it is important that the Viner intrigue him or her enough with the six seconds that they have attention. Individual viewers will respond to different intriguing elements. But if a Viner is able to reach enough viewers within various online communities, his or her video gets that much closer to success.

In many cases of viral videos, intrigue comes in the form of imitation, or iterability. Iterability means that something—a word, a song, a dance, or video—possesses the capacity to be repeated. By simply existing, a Vine video allows the opportunity for repetition, modification, or expansion. When imitating specific Vines, viewers single those moments out as meaningful or worthy of preserving. Even if viewers

change the context of the Vine, they still deem it as applicable to certain circumstances. But if there is no attraction or response to a video, viewers will not be compelled to repeat it. Thus, quotes, dance moves, jokes, or other random topics must be easy enough for viewers to imitate, but distinctive enough to stand out.

Iterability presents options for new perspectives. A word or video can mean something different to individual viewers. The difference could be slight, or it could be huge. But people take their own life experiences and apply them to their day-to-day situations and conversations. Thus one person can interpret a video one way, while another person can take away something else from the same video. Iterability paves the way for something new—whether it is a radical perspective on an old idea, or a new application for somebody in a different phase of life. In Vine, the common results of iterability are remixes. These remixes use material from the original video to create a new take. They are personal responses—a form of expression—to a moment, idea, trend, or figure. It is interesting to note that this reworked material shares the limelight of the original video, but skips the online obstacles that the original overcame to achieve virality. However, this borrowing doesn't negatively affect the original video. Instead, these remixes point viewers back to the first video, furthering its popularity. The process cycles as both benefit from the other's success.

Viewers share Vines that possess relatable content, intriguing lures, and ease of repetition. Sharing is essential in the Vine community—in any community, really. It is natural human nature to desire relationships with others. Sharing becomes an outlet for communication, outreach, and social acceptance. When individuals share a video, they outwardly demonstrate to the rest of the world that they want to be involved with others.

Sharing in the online community centers around a person's desire to form relationships. Online communities like Vine or Twitter link everybody together. The ease of sharing and interaction among users increases. With the click of a button, users publicly distribute and show something they are personally interested in. Other users comment on, like, or share the content, essentially approving or accepting the user who shared. The desire to be socially accepted—even if the acceptance takes place in an online community—resides in practically every user. If the same people consistently like a person's shared content, relationships grow. Users interact with each other based on common interests. It is almost ironic, because very little verbal communication occurs with online sharing. While these online relationships are certainly not as nourishing as physical relationships, they do still serve as relationships. Online relationships are often distant, because of geographical distances. But the online aspect of these relationships—and the ease of communicating online—breaches the distance. Users in these online communities meet and interact with people they never would have been able to communicate with or encounter face to face.

To share, a person must have a social group with whom he or she interacts. The group does not necessarily need to have the same opinions or outlooks on life. In fact, often in the social media world, people constantly differ. But viewers gravitate to videos that possess the emotional responses they feel. So a person desiring to escape reality may choose to watch a video that evokes laughter as a form of relief. People disappointed in their lack of dancing skills may look to the #dancelikedrake trend and feel superior or even hopeful. Regardless, people choose and form their community based on what types of Vine videos they like and share.

Virality emerges as a collection of multiple people's individual triggered responses to Vine videos. It stems from the human emotional desire to share. When enough people respond to something and share it with others, a video will spread. The emotional triggers may vary among users who share a certain video, but the video nonetheless elicits some type of response from its viewers. Vines consequently become forms of interaction and communication among viewers. In conclusion, if Viners wish to communicate with their viewers they must create content that possess ordinary qualities which viewers are familiar with, intriguing content to draw viewers in, and iterability to compel viewers to repeat the video. If Viners succeed with these elements, they will achieve viral Vines.

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