

# Online video consumption practices: Studying Finnish viral video mavens

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# ONLINE VIDEO CONSUMPTION PRACTICES: STUDYING FINNISH VIRAL VIDEO MAVENS

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**Abstract**

Online videos are being actively and in increasing amount consumed by modern day consumers, who benefit from an almost unlimited choice of online videos available. Moreover, online videos are not confined by time and place, allowing them to reach geographically dispersed audiences quickly. The fast diffusion of online content occasionally creates shooting stars of online video - viral videos. In viral marketing, like in online video advertising, consumers are harnessed as the distributional force of online content. This means that the diffusion of promotional messages is practically free for marketers. It is no surprise that marketers are eager to benefit from viral opportunities, which has led to an increase in online video advertising spending. If executed successfully, online video advertising can provide marketers with cost savings, better campaign reach, reduced advertising avoidance and earned publicity for the brand. Overall, online video consumption has experienced significant growth in the past years and it is estimated to continue to do so in the future.

Previous studies in the fields of viral concepts are mainly quantitative in nature and focus on fine tuning factors that are most likely to create viral success. The purpose of this study is to fill in the gap in previous studies by describing how online videos are actually used by consumers. More specifically, my study focuses on the hard-core users of online videos, termed as viral video mavens. In focusing on viral video mavens, my study provides practitioners and scholars in-depth knowledge about the distributional force of viral marketing. Narratives were collected in eight semi-structured interviews and a realistic approach was taken to interpret the stories. The interviews were analyzed using the theoretical lens of practice theory.

This study finds that the use of online videos is a highly routinized activity among Finnish viral video mavens. The main contribution of my study is the identification and description of key online video consumption practices. The findings are organized into four thematic groups, which refer to different ways of using online videos: loitering, learning, social interaction and controlling. Although the themes are overlapping and intertwined, certain practices occurred together more often than they did with others. Additionally, my study discusses the underlying understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures that essentially link sayings and doings. These social codifications are important elements as they guide the way practices are carried out. Overall, my findings should provide useful insights for marketers that are interested in promoting products and services through the use of online videos.

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**Keywords** online video, viral video maven, online video advertising, viral marketing, viral advertising, electronic word of mouth, practice theory

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# 1. Introduction

According a popular saying by Dr James McQuivey, if an image is worth 1000 words, then a minute of video is worth 1.8 billion words since videos shoot at 30 frames per second (Marketwired, 2014). Whether this is true or not, it is certain that the online video has experienced rapid growth in the past years. Over 6 billion hours of video content is being consumed each month solely on Youtube (2014), which totals almost an hour for every person on Earth. In the US, online video consumption totalled 38.2 billion videos during only the second quarter of 2014, up 43 percent from Q2 in 2013 (Adobe, 2014). According to a recent study by Deny Media (2015), 96 percent of 13-24 year olds consume freely accessible online videos through social media 11 hours per week on average. That is three hours more than what they spend watching traditional television (Deny Media, 2015). Overall, it is forecasted that by 2018 already 79 percent of all consumer Internet traffic will consist of video consumption, up from 66 percent in 2013 (Cisco, 2014).

The explosion of online video has provided opportunities for marketers to engage in new forms of advertising, termed as ‘online video advertising’ or ‘viral video advertising’ (Huang et al., 2013). A number of researchers claim that online video advertising can lead to cost savings, reach large audiences quickly, reduce customers’ advertising avoidance and earn media for the brand (Dobele et al., 2007; Cruz & Fill, 2008; Southgate et al., 2010; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Chen & Lee, 2014). In fact, researchers argue that online video is the fastest growing content format on the Internet (Lee & Lee, 2012). It seems that many marketers are reaching for the opportunities offered by this new marketing technique. According to IAB Europe (2014) online video advertising spending in Europe grew 45.4 percent during 2013, totalling nearly 1.19 billion euros.

My study falls specifically in the context of online video advertising but recognizes the contributions made by related studies. Researchers interested in how the Internet can be used to market products and services have carried out studies under an array of terms, including viral marketing (e.g. Eckler & Bolls, 2011), viral advertising (e.g. Porter & Golan, 2006), online video advertising (e.g. Lee & Lee, 2012), viral video advertising (e.g. Huang et al., 2013), and electronic word-of-mouth (e.g. Wolny &

Mueller, 2013). This study refers to the above-mentioned concepts collectively as viral concepts.

According to Bambo et al. (2008) and Liu-Thompkins (2012) viral marketing comprises any marketing strategy that encourages consumers to pass along online content. Similar to viral marketing, online video advertising is persuasive in nature, consists of promotional messages and is dependent on consumers propagating the online video to their peers (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Naturally, online video advertising has a content-specific focus whereas viral marketing does not specify the content through which consumers are reached. Thus, this study views online video advertising as a specific marketing technique under the superordinate term viral marketing.

According to Hennig and Phillips (2012:144) “understanding how to effectively create viral content and share videos through online networks is imperative for advertisers who wish to successfully harness the growing power of social media”. Marketers utilizing online video advertising are completely dependable on the consumers’ willingness to share (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Yet, very little is known about the characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of consumers, who actively share online video content (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). Researchers in the field of viral marketing and related viral concepts argue that both academics and practitioners would benefit from an understanding of what motivates consumers to engage with brand-related content online and, consequently, how brands can encourage or discourage such behaviours (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Although marketers seem keen to benefit from online video advertising, research lacks knowledge about how consumers use online videos (Hennig & Phillips, 2012; Lee & Lee, 2012) and, in turn, how marketers can use online video advertising to gain desired outcomes (Huang et al., 2013). Due to the rapid increase in consumers’ online video usage and the growing interest by marketers to benefit from this new marketing technique it seems vital to learn more about the processes of consuming online videos.

## **1.1 Research question**

Naturally, research conducted within the viral concepts is firmly rooted in the marketing literature and they approach the use of online content from the marketer’s

viewpoint. Many of them focus on various adjustable factors, which marketers use to encourage consumers' interaction with branded online content. My study differs from previous research in the sense that it has a strong focus on the consumer side of the story. I am interested in describing a specific form of consumer behaviour, where the presence of marketer-produced content, as will be seen, is not self-evident. Thus, my study takes a more holistic approach into understanding online video consumption in general, not just in regards to branded content.

The main contribution of this study is to provide in-depth knowledge about how online videos are actually used by consumers. This is an approach that has been overlooked by past researchers. Most of the previous studies are quantitative in nature and measure quantifiable factors affecting viral marketing success. Thus, previous literature lacks qualitative in-depth understanding and description of how actions are carried out. This study aims at filling that gap by identifying key practices, which essentially describe the consumption of online videos. Taking a practice theoretical approach, I am interested in the identification and description of a multitude of practices, which depict the consumption of online videos. As defined by Halkier and Jensen (2011), practices are routinized ways of doing things, guided by a social and cultural context. This study is also interested in the underlying understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures that link doings and sayings (Schatzki, 1996). Practice theoretical approach allows the researcher to describe the process of doing something as well as the underlying elements that depict why something is done the way it is. This study introduces four thematic groups of practices, which essentially describe the use of online videos.

Being a marketing thesis, this study is ultimately interested in providing information for marketers that wish to use online videos to promote their products and services. However, unbranded and user generated video contents are an essential part of my study. Previous studies have mainly focused on the consumption of branded content, widely ignoring videos that are user generated or unbranded. However, studies argue that the majority of all online content is user generated (Storybox, 2014). Moreover, consumers may not always be aware of whether an online video has commercial roots, as different levels of cooperation with companies are common in online videos these days. Additionally, studies have argued that user generated videos that include

brands are regarded as more trustworthy and receive more views on average than traditional marketer-produced online video advertisements (Crowdtap, 2014). Companies might benefit from understanding why consumers enjoy consuming user-generated online video content. Thus, my study focuses on all types of online videos that are freely available for consumers.

In short, the purpose is to look at the use of online videos from the consumer's perspective and to identify and describe key practices related to the use of online videos. More precisely, my study focuses on active users of online videos, so called viral video mavens. The main goal of this study is to understand how viral video mavens use online videos in their daily lives. The main research question can be formulated as following:

*How do Finnish viral video mavens use online videos in their daily lives and what kinds of practices are related to this?*

To answer my research question, my interviews focused on uncovering stories of everyday situations, where viral video mavens use online videos. These stories provided detailed information about how online videos are embedded in their daily lives. As my practice theoretical approach assumes that online video usage is a routinized activity, my study participants were required to demonstrate strong commitment to the use of online videos to be considered as carriers of such practice.

## **1.2 Research structure**

This research consists of eight chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the research topic and introduces the research question. The second chapter conceptualizes the various viral concepts that are relevant to my study. The paper then continues to the literature overview in the third chapter and presents relevant previous studies carried out within the viral concepts. The fourth chapter introduces the theoretical lens, practice theory, which has been used to analyse and organize my findings into practices. The fifth chapter discusses the methodological approach to conducting my study. The sixth will introduce the main findings of my study, divided into four themes. My findings are further discussed in relation to previous studies in the seventh chapter. Finally, the eighth chapter concludes my study and discusses the



contributions and limitations of my study and provides suggestions for future avenues of research. Research literature is presented at the end.

## **2. Viral concepts**

Researchers interested in how the Internet can be used to market products and services have focused their studies on numerous viral concepts, mainly viral marketing (e.g. Bambo et al., 2008; Eckler & Bolls, 2011), viral advertising (e.g. Porter & Golan, 2006; Eckler & Rodgers, 2010), online video advertising (e.g. Lee & Lee, 2012), viral video advertising (e.g. Huang et al., 2013), and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (e.g. Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). All above-mentioned viral concepts are closely related to my study area and have contributed to the literature review. Although researchers sometimes use these terms interchangeably, recent commentators have argued that clear differences between the terms should be established to further conceptualize the field (Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, my study falls particularly under the online video advertising concept due to its content specification. Although my study is more interested in how consumers, rather than marketers, use online video, the ultimate goal is to provide information that can be utilized by marketers to improve their online video advertising. Online video advertising as a unique concept has received far less attention than some of the other viral concepts, especially viral marketing and eWOM. Moreover, studies of online videos have been carried out under an array of viral concepts as researchers are in disagreement about which term is the most appropriate one. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account and discuss research carried out under various viral concepts. The following will introduce viral concepts relevant for this study and discuss their similarities and differences. This will help to further distinguish viral concepts from each other and to demonstrate the scope of viral studies.

### **2.1 Viral marketing and viral advertising**

Jurvetson and Draper first introduced the term ‘viral marketing’ in 1997 to describe Hotmail’s marketing tactic, which promoted their free email account service (Porter & Golan, 2006). The tagline “Get your private, free email from Hotmail at <http://www.hotmail.com>” at the end of each outgoing email proved extremely successful in attracting new email users, contributing to 10 million Hotmail email

users in just seven months (Porter & Golan, 2006). The concept of marketing being ‘viral’ is borrowed from the contagious nature of a living biological virus spreading through the society with exponentially increasing power (Jurvetson & Draper, 1997 in Porter & Golan, 2006). However, the growth pattern for viral marketing is exponential only in case the reproduction rate exceeds one, which means that each message receiver forwards the message to at least two other people (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

Jurvetson and Draper (1997) in Petrescu and Korgaonkar (2011) simply defined viral marketing as online word of mouth, which is enhanced by the use of networks. Some later definitions offer a more comprehensive view, for example Dobeles et al. (2005:144) define viral marketing as “the process of encouraging individuals to pass along favourable or compelling marketing information they receive in a hypermedia environment: information that is favourable or compelling either by design or by accident”. Unlike the early definition by Jurvetson and Draper (1997), later definitions of viral marketing adequately take into account the promotional nature of viral marketing messages and the intentional exploitation of consumers as a marketing force.

In addition to viral marketing, a number of researchers use the term ‘viral advertising’ to refer to the same phenomenon. According to Porter and Golan (2006:29), viral advertising can be described as “unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others”. Some later definitions however, have excluded the term ‘provocative’ from the definition as it is seen as unnecessarily limiting (Southgate et al., 2010). Eckler and Rodgers (2010:186) define viral advertising as “widely used form of unpaid communication through persuasive messages created by identifiable sponsors and distributed among peers on interactive, digital platforms”.

As can be noted, the definitions for viral marketing and viral advertising offer very little differences and the two terms are often used interchangeably. However, Petrescu and Korgaonkar (2011) argue that the main difference between viral marketing and viral advertising can be found in their scope. Petrescu and Korgaonkar (2011) suggest

that viral marketing includes both online and offline activities designed to provoke consumers to pass along commercial messages to their peers. Similarly, Bambo et al. (2008) and Liu-Thompkins (2012) argue that viral marketing broadly describes any marketing strategy, which encourages consumers to pass along online content. On the other hand, viral advertising takes place exclusively in the online world and consists of unpaid distribution of either commercial or user generated content from consumer-to-consumer (Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011). These definitions suggest that the term viral marketing could be considered to allow a larger set of promotional activities than the term viral advertising. Thus, this study views viral marketing as the superordinate term, which entails viral advertising.

## **2.2 Electronic word of mouth**

In addition to viral marketing and viral advertising, research has widely used other terms, such as ‘electronic word of mouth’ (eWOM) (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013; Wolny & Mueller, 2013) and, to a lesser extent, ‘word-of-mouth’ (Breazeale, 2008). The origins of the term eWOM are, naturally, in the term ‘word of mouth’ (WOM), which is often used as the starting point for understanding eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). As the term would suggest, eWOM differs from traditional WOM in that it takes place in the online world. Although when compared to traditional word of mouth eWOM may seem less personal, it is considered to be more powerful due to the fact that it is immediate, credible, publicly available and has a significant reach potential (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).

According to Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013:147-148) eWOM refers to “any statement based on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product, service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (through web sites, social networks, instant messages, news feeds...)”. Taking into consideration the modern day elements of online interaction, Wolny and Mueller (2013) expand their definition of eWOM to include also non-textual communications such as ‘likes’ on Facebook and ‘retweets’ on Twitter. Essentially, eWOM is any type of online interaction, where consumers discuss brands, products and companies either by marketer’s own active encouragement or without it.

In terms of the relationship between eWOM and viral marketing, Ferguson (2008) argues that viral marketing, at its best, creates positive eWOM, which may lead to product trial and purchase. Similarly Wolny and Mueller (2013) posit eWOM under the main category of viral marketing. In other words, viral marketing is the marketer's active effort to produce eWOM. Somewhat conversely, Porter and Golan (2006) suggest that viral advertising is a subsection of eWOM. However, the definition of eWOM does not imply active encouragement of pass along behaviour in the same way as both viral marketing and viral advertising do. Rather, it refers to consumers' participation in online interaction that simply concerns the marketer in some way. Therefore, following Ferguson's (2008) argument, in this study eWOM is seen as a result of viral marketing, viral advertising and any of its forms, such as online video advertising.

Moreover, I would also argue that eWOM could be seen as the consumer's side of viral marketing. When consumers consume branded online content they themselves do not practice viral marketing (i.e. purposefully encouraging consumers' pass-along behaviour). Rather, they themselves are targets of viral marketing efforts by the marketer to encourage consumption of branded online content. If the marketer manages to evoke the consumers' interest, consumers may choose to engage in some type of activities with branded online content. In sum, this study refers to viral marketing as marketers' efforts to encourage consumers to consume branded online content and eWOM as consumers participating in any activities, where they engage with online content that concerns the marketer.

### **2.3 Online video advertising and viral video advertising**

In efforts to engage with the modern day fragmented audiences, who tend to resist traditional advertising, researchers have looked towards new marketing techniques, which utilize online video (Chen & Lee, 2014). Researchers use both the term online video advertising (Lee & Lee, 2012) and viral video advertising (Huang et al., 2013) to discuss the use of promotional videos in an online setting. Additionally, researchers have used the term 'microfilm advertising' to refer to videos, which are longer in length (Chen & Lee, 2014). My study is interested in all the possible ways online videos are used by consumers and thus all of the above-mentioned approaches are in the focus of this study. However, for reasons of clarity, my study prefers the use of

online video advertising. In this study, online video advertising refers to the use of online videos to promote products and services. To return to the hierarchical organization of viral concepts, online video advertising can be viewed as one specific form of viral advertising whereby promotional videos are used in an online setting (Lee et al., 2013).

### **2.3.1 Online videos**

To understand online video advertising, one must look at online videos as a distinct content type. One important specification is in relation to the two terms ‘online video’ and ‘viral video’, which have both been widely used by previous researchers. However, only videos that become popular through active sharing in the online setting can be described as ‘viral’ videos (Broxton & Vaver, 2013). To grasp the entirety of videos available on the Internet, this study prefers the use of the term online video. In this study, online video refers to any video, either a consumer or marketer-produced, which is freely available on the Internet. This excludes video-on-demand (VOD) types of services, which operate on the basis of limited access provided through monthly payments. My approach is also supported by the fact that researchers have not yet offered any specific definitions of what level of sharing and views earn a video the label of viral.

Notably, online videos can be either user generated or marketer-produced. In 2014, four out of ten of the most popular (combining views, shares, comments and likes) videos, excluding music videos, on YouTube were marketer-produced advertisements (Time, 2014). This would suggest that online videos are a promising content type for marketers to promote their products and services. However, consumers also actively produce online videos, which is generally referred to as user generated content. Studies argue that user generated content is considered as more trustworthy than other media (Crowdtap, 2014). In 2014, millennials spent 30 percent of their media time consuming user generated content (Crowdtap, 2014). More importantly in regards to online video advertising, user generated videos about brands receive on average ten times more views than traditional marketer-produced online video advertisements on YouTube (Reelseo, 2014). Thus, users have a significant role as both the consumers and producers of online video. This makes online video advertising a rather

challenging content type, as marketers are not fully in control of the shared content.

Another interesting aspect to online video advertising is that as the marketers do not have to pay for the promotional space on the Internet video sharing sites, marketers are free to create videos that are longer in duration. This specific type of online video advertising is referred to as microfilm advertising (Chen & Lee, 2014). As described by Chen and Lee (2014:294), microfilm advertising is “a lengthy dramatic advertising format – with promotional messages sponsored by a consumer brand – distributed through unpaid online communication channels”. ‘Minifilms’ or ‘microfilms’ are therefore by definition longer in duration, usually between 3 to 12 minutes (Chen & Lee, 2014). Similar to other online videos, the marketer is identified either in the beginning or at the end and brand messages may be explicit or implicit (Chen & Lee, 2014). Also other types of online videos are emerging, latest being ‘graphics interchange format’ (GIF), which are compressed image files often created from a longer video to save time (Urban Dictionary, 2015).

Interestingly, online videos are essentially dynamic by nature. When comparing the changes in the top five stories in new media versus old media, Pew Research (2010) found that in the mainstream press 50 percent of last week’s top five stories were still among the top five the following week. In contrast, only 9 percent of top five online videos maintained their place the following week (Pew Research, 2010). It would seem that the opportunity for marketers to leverage the marketing force of peer-to-peer sharing comes early in online videos life. Studies suggest that 34 percent of the first day video viewings result from peer-to-peer sharing and this number drops down to 16 percent by the end of the third month (Broxton et al., 2013). More interestingly, the process of viral sharing also seems to be speeding up. Whereas in 2013 22.3 percent of the total shares occurred within the first three days, in 2014 that figure had doubled into 42.4 percent of total shares taking place during the first three days of the video’s release (Unruly, 2014).

### **2.3.2 Online videos as advertising technique**

Considered as a somewhat pioneer in online video advertising, BMW launched its massively popular eight piece series of action-packed minifilms labelled as ‘The Hire’

already back in 2001 and 2002 (Porter & Golan, 2006; Chen & Lee, 2014). The directors of the individual films included world-famous talents such as Guy Ritchie, Ang Lee and Ridley Scott (BMW, 2005). All of the films displayed the British actor Clive Owen in the leading role as ‘The Driver’ and the supporting roles were carried out by celebrities such as Madonna, Adriana Lima and Marilyn Manson (Eckler & Rodgers, 2010). Most importantly, the main focus and the real stars of the minifilms were BMW cars. The films were distributed online and the promotion of the films was carried out through viral marketing, attributing to over 100 million views until the videos were removed from the company’s website in 2005 (BMW, 2005). Overall, the film series was considered to be a huge success, launching the career of Clive Owen and earning the creative team the well-esteemed Grand Clio award in 2002 (Porter & Golan, 2006). Most importantly, it is one of the first examples of online video advertising campaigns, which managed to harness consumers as a strong distributional force and turned an online video into a viral phenomenon.

As noted earlier, marketers are eagerly picking up online video advertising as a new marketing technique. In 2013, the online video advertising spending in Europe grew 45.4 percent to nearly 1.19 billion euros (IAB Europe, 2014). Notably, this was the first time that Europe’s investment in online video ads reached the one billion euros mark (IAB Europe, 2014). In comparison, the total online advertising spending in Europe added up to 27.3 billion euros, which is fast approaching the total spending for television advertising, totalling 32.3 billion euros in 2013 (IAB Europe, 2014). During the same period, the online video advertising in Finland experienced a growth rate of 24.1 percent, which was below both the European average and the growth rates in other Scandinavian countries (Sweden 40.5%, Norway 50.0%, Denmark 62.6%) (IAB Europe, 2014). On average, online video ads represented 13.1 percent of the total display market value in Europe in 2013, up from 12.9 percent in 2012 and 9.7 percent in 2011 (IAB Europe, 2012, 2013, 2014).

A number of researchers argue that successful online video advertising can provide marketers with cost savings, better campaign reach, reduced advertising avoidance and earned publicity for the brand (Dobele et al., 2007; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Southgate et al., 2010). One of the obvious benefits of viral marketing over traditional advertising is that the circulation costs for online content are marginal due to the viral



nature of the content (Chen & Lee, 2014). However, this also means that marketers are completely dependable on the consumers' willingness to share their content (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Ironically, marketers identify this lack of control over the distribution as one of the major disadvantages of viral marketing (Cruz & Fill, 2008). In terms of reach, viral marketing is not limited by space and time and can therefore reach vast amounts of consumers both locally and globally very quickly (Cruz & Fill, 2008). As will be discussed later, research has shown that high reach can backfire and lead to a decrease in advertisement persuasiveness (Tucker, 2014). Online video advertising is also seen as the much-needed answer for engaging with the modern day fragmented audiences, who resist traditional advertising (Chen & Lee, 2014).

Although BMW is an example of a high-involvement product with passionate followers, researchers agree that to be successful in viral marketing, the product itself does not have to have a "wow" factor. The main focus is in the online content, such as entertaining online video, which is the main object of interaction and interest for consumers (Porter & Golan, 2006). As Lee and Lee (2012) suggest, the main benefit of online video advertising is that it combines the best of both worlds: the power of traditional television advertising and the direct response ability provided by the Internet. Unlike in traditional advertising platforms, online videos are delivered to customers in an interactive setting characterized by viewer pull and control rather than enforced marketer push (Huang et al., 2013). Researchers in the field of online video advertising have duly noted that, historically, centralized media organizations acted as the 'arbiters of taste' controlling what content would be displayed to audiences (Broxton et al., 2013) to whom the only options were to switch channels or turn off the television.

Researchers argue that the online setting, which allows voluntary watching of online videos, creates a potential for deeper brand engagement and further interaction (Southgate et al., 2010). Similarly Eckler and Bolls (2011) argue that online videos have the potential to provoke more complex, emotionally and motivationally intense processes than traditional advertising. Unlike with traditional advertisements, the online setting allows consumers to replay the video, rate it, comment it and, most importantly from a marketer's point of view, forward the video to others (Southgate et al., 2010). Especially the unique ability for playback allows consumers to control their

advertising exposure, which empowers and activates consumers (Lee & Lee, 2012).

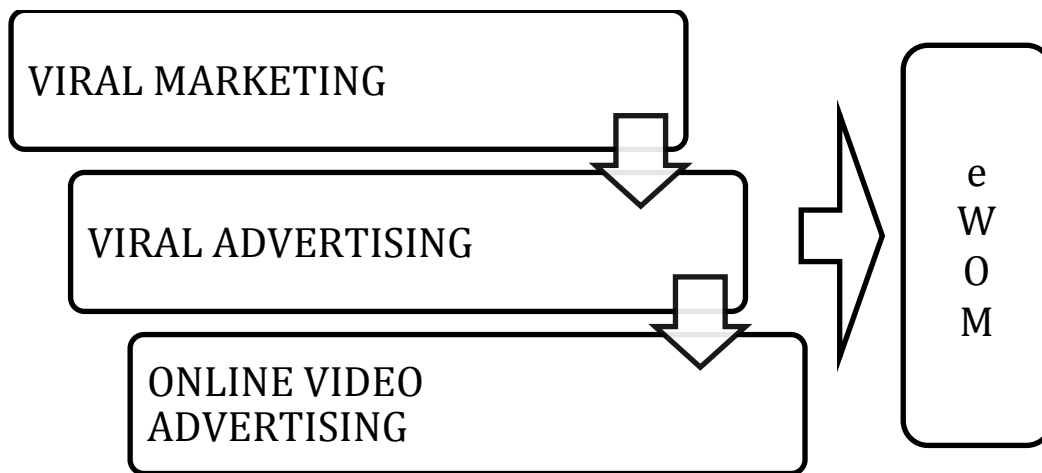
Online video advertising, like other forms of viral advertising, is argued to be more personal than traditional advertising (Porter & Golan, 2006). The marketer's intent is to make the video viral through sources that are already trusted, such as friends and family (Porter & Golan, 2006), which means the message comes from a more intimate source. Additionally, online video is argued to be a more compelling form of advertising than other online advertising forms, such as banner-ads and pop-ups (Lee & Lee, 2012).

Lastly, researchers have also studied the possible cannibalization of online videos on television. Cha and Chan-Olmsted (2012) found that online video platforms respond to consumers' needs of timely learning better than television. Interestingly, television is still deemed to satisfy consumers' needs for relaxation and entertainment better than online platforms (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012). Although television and online videos were found to occupy somewhat differing roles in the lives of active users of online videos (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012), recent studies suggest that 13-24 year olds already spend more time consuming online videos than traditional television (Deny Media, 2015).

## **2.4 Summary**

Researchers seeking to understand how the Internet can be used to market products and services have conducted studies under an array of viral concepts. As noted, the content specific focus of my study distinctively associates it with online video advertising, which refers to the use of online videos to promote products and services in the online setting. However, online video advertising falls under the superordinate term viral marketing, which refers to any promotional activities carried out both online and offline to encourage consumers' pass-along behaviours. More precisely, my study regards online video advertising as one specific form of viral advertising. Viral advertising consists of unpaid peer-to-peer distribution of commercial or user generated content, which takes place exclusively in the online world. Thus, viral marketing entails viral advertising and in turn, viral advertising entails online video advertising. Additionally, these concepts are closely linked to eWOM, which can be regarded as an outcome of the above-mentioned activities.

The following figure depicts the viral concepts that have been used in the literature review of this study. It helps to clarify the hierarchical order of viral concepts and how they relate to each other. Moreover, it answers to the call by Petrescu and Korgaonkar (2011) to distinguish and conceptualize the various viral terms as separate concepts.



**Figure 1: Viral concepts**

This study defined online videos as user generated or marketer-produced video format content, which is freely available online. Online videos become viral through active sharing, after which they can be referred to as viral videos. However, research disagrees on what level of sharing earns a video the label of being viral. Online videos are dynamic by nature and studies suggest that online videos gain most of their shares just days after their release. Online videos are also quick to rise to, and fall from, the peak of their popularity.

### **3. Studying viral success**

Overall, various viral concepts have received a great deal of attention since the introduction of electronic media as it facilitates the communication between marketers and potential buyers. Interestingly, viral marketing implies a move from marketer-to-consumer communications towards consumer-to-consumer communications (Chiu et al., 2007). According to Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) eWOM plays a major role in public affairs and marketing these days. As a number of previous studies suggest, consumers perceive eWOM advertising as a more reliable and credible source of information than direct communication from marketers when trying to make good purchase decisions (Hennig & Phillips, 2012; Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). Indeed, the act of sharing or forwarding branded content may be perceived as an endorsement of the brand by the sender's social network. The marketer's goal is very straightforward: to have consumers associate the good feeling gained from the branded online content with the marketer's brand (Porter & Golan, 2006).

As noted earlier, one of the benefits of viral marketing is that the distribution is virtually free for the marketer as consumers themselves work as the distributional force (Dobele et al., 2005). Thus, turning consumers into a marketing force is crucial to ensure the content's viral spread (Phelps et al., 2004). The many-to-many communication on the Internet suggest that geographical location does not limit the spread of viral marketing messages and therefore the messages have the potential to reach consumers on a global scale in a very short time period (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). To explain why certain pieces go viral and others do not researchers have taken different approaches. Overall, previous researchers argue that the question why certain online messages are more viral than others has not received enough attention in the academic literature (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Botha & Reyneke, 2013). The academic research has been insufficient in uncovering what leads to viral success and makes people to share content, what type of content is most likely to be shared (Berger & Milkman, 2012) and what exactly makes viral campaigns successful (Eckler & Bolls, 2011).

One of the first to study the viral spread of messages online was Phelps (2004) with

his study of email pass along motivations. Although his study was carried out before the boom of social media, already Phelps (2004) noted that harnessing customers as a marketing force is essential for marketers hoping to succeed in viral marketing. This means that marketers must find ways to capture consumers' interest with their online content and motivate consumers to share the content to their peers. Indeed, researchers in the field of viral marketing have devoted much of their attention into understanding what motivates consumers to forward online content to others. However, less focus has been granted towards understanding the use of online content, or in terms of my study purpose, how consumers consume online videos.

The following will discuss previous findings regarding viral success. My literature review does not categorize previous studies into practices, as there is no existing comprehension about what viral practices exists in the first place. Moreover, some of the studies focus on general online conversations or forwarding behaviour, but some are more specific and have either a category focus (e.g. fashion) or specific content focus (such as online videos), which is likely to result in different findings. The different study approaches have been taken into consideration when comparing the results and the study approaches are noted in the text. My organization of previous studies follows the categorization introduced by Liu-Thompkins (2012). He suggested that previous efforts to understand, what contributes to viral success, could be roughly divided into three categories: message characteristics, sender and receiver characteristics and social networks characteristics (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). This categorization seems relevant because it answers the questions what, who and where. Importantly from a marketer's perspective, it also suggests, which factors are under the control of the marketer.

The first category, message characteristics, includes studies that are interested in the factor that marketers have the most control over – the message (Hsieh et al., 2012). When considering the message, marketers decide on the creative design and technical aspects (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). Studies that for example suggest humour (e.g. Hsieh et al., 2012) and pleasant emotional tone (e.g. Eckler & Bolls, 2011) increase the potential for viral success fall under this category. In addition to message characteristic, research has also focused on the sender and receiver characteristics to determine who are the driving distributional forces of peer-to-peer sharing and how

they are motivated. Researchers have suggested that specific personality traits (e.g. Chiu et al., 2007), motivational factors (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Chiu et al., 2007; Ho & Dempsey, 2010) and emotions (e.g. Dobeles et al., 2007; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Botha & Reyneke, 2013) can be linked to the senders and receivers of viral messages. In addition to message and sender and receiver characteristics, studies have, although to a lesser amount, suggested that social network characteristics influence viral marketing success. Research done under this category is interested in the online connections between consumers and suggests that the network, through which the message eventually spreads, determines the success of the viral campaign (e.g. Liu-Thompkins, 2012).

Before moving on to discuss various factors, which contribute to the success of viral marketing, it must be noted that, what exactly counts as viral success and how it can be measured, has received very little academic attention. Commentators of viral marketing have argued that not only is viral marketing difficult to execute, it is also challenging to measure (Ferguson, 2008). Nelson-Field et al. (2013) suggest that successful viral campaigns do not just manage to create a lot of buzz, but the positive results can also be seen in turnover, sales and brand development. Viral practitioners seem to support this holistic view, suggesting that a multitude of measurements should be applied when assessing viral success, including cognitive (reach, awareness, knowledge), behavioral (hits/downloads, shares), and financial (ROI, brand equity) goals (Cruz & Fill, 2008). Moreover, the evaluative criteria should vary according to the viral campaign in question (Cruz & Fill, 2008).

As mentioned, the following sections will follow the categorization introduced by Liu-Thompkins (2012). Notably, these categories are not mutually exclusive and some findings may provide interesting overlap between the categories, which further shows that the scope of factors affecting viral success is immense. However, for the purpose of clarity and organized processing, previous studies on viral success factors have been divided into three main categories: message characteristics, sender and receiver characteristics and network characteristics.

### **3.1 Message characteristics**

Researchers taking the message characteristics approach often argue that it is the only

component fully under the control of marketers and therefore the most relevant one (Hsieh et al., 2012). In efforts to determine what message characteristics are successful in the online environment, researchers have looked into both creative and technical aspects of promotional online messages. Studies that for example discuss whether provocative or neutral content works better in online video advertisements (e.g. Brown et al., 2010), what are the technical requirements for online content (e.g. Hsieh et al., 2012) and whether the emotional tone of the online ad should be pleasant or negative (e.g. Eckler & Bolls, 2011) fall under the category of message characteristics.

### **3.1.1 Creative aspects**

In their research on valence of viral video advertisements, Eckler and Bolls (2011) found that pleasant emotional tone in an online advertisement correlates with a positive attitude and intention to forward the content to others. Consequently, online video advertisements with negative or mixed tone lead to negative attitudes and are less likely to be shared (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Ironically, Porter and Golan (2006) reported that viral advertisements are more likely to imply negative or mixed tone as they include more sex, violence and nudity than traditional television advertising.

Brown et al. (2010) focused their study on comedic violence, thus combining humor and violence, both representing rather different emotional tones. Their study also measured the arousal level in terms of the intensity of violence and severity of consequences. Interestingly, Brown et al. (2010) found that humorous online advertisement with high levels of violence and severe consequences result in greater message involvement, better brand information retention, more favorable perception of the advertisement and greater likelihood for pass-along behavior than low-intensity acts of violence with moderate consequences. The preference for high levels of comedic violence seems so strong that an initial aggravation, which justifies the violence, is not compulsory (Brown et al., 2010). However, there is a slight preference towards perceived legitimacy of violence in cases where extreme violence and consequences are displayed and, therefore, Brown et al. (2010) suggest that marketers should use aggravation as a preemptive move to justify high levels of violence and consequences. However, the aggravation-response justification for

violence seems to have no influence on ad likeability on low levels of violence and consequences (Brown et al., 2010).

Also combining both valence and arousal level, Nelson-Field et al. (2013) argue that online videos that provoke high arousal (either positive or negative) are twice as likely to be shared than videos that elicit low arousal. Similarly Guadagno et al. (2013) suggest that online videos, which create stronger affective responses, are more likely to be forwarded. These findings provide support for Brown et al. (2010) suggesting high-intensity content is likely to become more viral than low-intensity. Ironically, Nelson-Field et al. (2013) found that marketers are more likely to produce online video advertisements that lack emotional strength, as three quarters of the marketer-produced videos were considered to be low arousal.

In regards to emotional tone, Nelson-Field et al. (2013) found a slight preference for positive rather than negative valence. Their study comes to the conclusion that online videos with positive emotional tone receive about 30 percent more shares than videos that elicit any other emotional response (Nelson-Field et al., 2013). Similarly Guadagno et al. (2013) found support for positive valence gaining more shares than negative. However, negatively arousing videos were observed to generate more shares than non-emotional videos (Guadagno et al., 2013), suggesting an order hierarchy of positive, negative and non-emotional valence. Interestingly, Nelson-Field et al. (2013) argue that the difference in share intentions between positive and negative valence can be accounted for the influence of arousal level and not the valence itself. This conclusion derives from the observation, which suggests that emotional tone has influence on sharing intentions only on high levels of arousal (Nelson-Field et al., 2013). Thus, contrasting the findings by Eckler and Bolls (2011), Nelson-Field et al. (2013) argue that arousal is the most significant determinant of sharing behavior regardless of valence.

In the study by Brown et al. (2010) the presence of humor was suggested to ameliorate any negative feelings normally attached to violence. This would suggest that humorous appeals are effective as they can cancel out the effects of negative valence in online content. Indeed, researchers argue that humor is a powerful way to stimulate the viewer's emotions and consumers are likely to want to share these



emotions with others (Hsieh et al., 2012; Guadagno et al., 2013). Hsieh et al. (2012) noted that perceived humor helps in creating engaging videos and it has a significant positive influence both on attitude and intention to forward. Guadagno et al. (2013) reported that consumers were most likely to forward funny videos as opposed to video content, which was disgusting, angry or non-emotional. Similarly viral video mavens in the research by Hennig and Phillips (2012) noted that the videos had to be either humorous or interesting for them to want to share them. It seems that many companies are already benefitting from the use of humor in viral marketing. Porter and Golan (2006) reported that humor is used at almost equal levels across various industries promoting their products through viral marketing.

In addition to blurring the negative effects of violence, also other studies offer support to the moderating role of humor in online content. Tucker (2014) focused her research of viral video advertisements on two aspects of viral video success: the advertisement reach, which describes the total number of views, and advertisement persuasiveness, which describes how willing the consumers are to either purchase or adopt a favorable attitude toward the product. In her research, she identified a tradeoff between these two factors as her findings suggest the existence of an inverse-U shape correlation between reach and persuasiveness. According to Tucker (2014), this negative relationship begins at three to four million total views and from thereon the persuasiveness keeps on decreasing. Several robustness tests indicate that advertisement wearout, product category, advertisement length, campaign length, audience age and awareness do not explain the decrease in advertisement persuasiveness (Tucker, 2014). What is most interesting in her study is the finding suggesting the tradeoff is less severe for advertisements that contain humorous as opposed to outrageous content (Tucker, 2014). Therefore, viral video advertisements that contain humor can have both high reach and high persuasiveness.

The results by Tucker (2014) provide further support to the findings by Hsieh et al. (2012), Guadagno et al. (2013) and Hennig and Phillips (2012) regarding consumers' favorable attitudes toward humorous appeals in online videos. It would seem that outrageous viral videos attract a large number of views but are not successful in persuading consumers to purchase or adopt a favorable attitude towards the product (Tucker, 2014). Additionally, although both outrageousness and humor increase the

total views for an advertisement, only humor provokes an increase in the total number of comments (Tucker, 2014). Interestingly, Tucker (2014) found that advertisements that motivate consumers to engage with them and leave comments are more persuasive in terms of product purchase. Most importantly, viral video advertisements, which generate comments with product name mentioned, do not experience the earlier-mentioned tradeoff between advertisement reach and persuasiveness (Tucker, 2014). These results suggest that humor and advertisement engagement are the most important factors for marketers to consider.

Although the results by Tucker are a great example of the power of humor, the identified tradeoff between reach and persuasiveness highlights the importance of timeliness in the online world. Hennig and Phillips (2012) found that timeliness, which refers to how long the video has been available online, is a crucial factor when consumers consider whether to pass along a video. Active sharers of online content reported they prefer sharing videos that they assume others have not seen yet as they do not see any added value in sharing a video that has already been seen by most of their peers (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). This demonstrates Tucker's (2014) findings in action, as consumers are more likely to share videos that have yet to achieve high reach, as they are perceived as more relevant than videos that have already been seen by many of their peers.

### **3.1.2 Technical aspects**

In addition to creative aspects, also more technical message characteristics need to be taken into consideration when creating online content such as online video advertisements. Compared to the creative aspects of the message, research on this area is very scarce. However, online videos are a multimedia format, which differs from other contents and sets new types of expectations. Unsurprisingly, consumers seem to prefer high quality videos in the online world. Hsieh et al. (2012) found that consumers tend to respond positively towards vivid video with richer visual and sound effects. Interestingly, Tucker (2014) observed that visual appeals provoke a larger number of views and comments only when the visual aspect is ranked very high. This suggests that in order to stand out, the investment on the video quality has to be relatively high.

Another interesting aspect of marketer-produced online videos is how clearly marketers should communicate that the content is, in fact, commercial. In terms of online videos, marketers can highlight their presence for example by naming the video accordingly, inserting company logos, publishing the video on their own channel and communicating their presence within the video. Although Nelson-Field et al. (2013) findings suggest that, in general, non-commercial videos provoke more shares than commercial ones, the results by Southgate et al. (2010) demonstrate that, among online video advertisements, a strong brand integration positively correlates with the total video viewings. Southgate et al. (2012) found that online video advertisements that rank high in advertisement distinctiveness also enjoy higher viewing volumes. Moreover, in order to impact consumer brand attitudes, the video must attach good memories to the brand (Southgate et al., 2010). Consequently, to benefit from the positive feelings, it is important for marketers to visibly communicate the video is marketer-produced (Southgate et al., 2010). Without clear brand integration the positive feeling aroused by the content cannot be associated with any specific brand.

In support of the findings by Southgate et al. (2010), Hennig and Phillips (2012) found that viral video mavens prefer marketers to explicitly declare their online videos as branded content. In fact, the study participants described feeling deceived after discovering that branded content had been masked as user generated (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). Conversely, Hsieh et al. (2012) claim that prominent brand information in online videos may cause negative attitudes and decrease forwarding intention. Despite mixing results, it would seem that consumers appreciate honesty about the message origin but overly commercial messages may provoke negative attitudes.

To sum, the research done in regards to the message characteristics seeks to understand, which message characteristics are most likely to lead to viral success. Roughly, the previous studies can be divided into those that concern the creative aspects and those that concern the technical aspects of the message. As discussed above in regards to the creative aspects, researchers have argued that online videos with high intensity, pleasant emotional tone and humorous emotional appeal are most likely to succeed in the online environment. In terms of the technical aspects, studies

note that consumers tend to respond positively towards vivid video with richer visual and sound effects. Interestingly, visual appeals seem to provoke more views and comments only when the content's visual aspect is ranked very high. Moreover, consumers value honesty about the content origin but overly commercial messages may be viewed unfavorably.

### **3.2 Sender and receiver characteristics**

Out of the three categories, sender and receiver characteristics have probably received the most attention from academics. Research in this area tries to understand the characteristics of consumers, who act as the highly important distribution force of viral marketing. It is argued that in order to manage viral marketing, marketers must understand what triggers the need for consumers to share their experiences with others online (Phelps et al., 2004; Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). Sender and receiver characteristics are an especially interesting factor because it is not under the full control of marketers (Cruz & Fill, 2008). However, the identification of the key triggers and consumers, who respond to these stimuli, is likely to have a positive impact on viral success (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Studies in this area have tried to uncover motivations (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Chiu et al., 2007; Ho & Dempsey, 2010; Wolny & Mueller, 2013), emotions (e.g. Dobele et al., 2007; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Botha & Reyneke, 2013) and personality traits (e.g. Phelps et al., 2004; Chiu et al., 2007; Hennig & Phillips, 2012) linked with the senders and receivers of online content. Without consumers interacting online with marketers and their peers, there would not be any viral marketing. Notably, the senders and receivers of online content may or may not fall under the definition of viral mavens and many researchers do not distinguish between occasional versus active seeders of online content in their studies. Therefore, the sender and receiver characteristic are not representative of just one specific group, which is likely to account for some of the mixing results between different studies.

#### **3.2.1 Personality traits**

Researchers have suggested that certain personality traits can be associated with consumers, who actively engage in the consumption of online content. Researchers

have shown that consumers differ significantly in their online behaviors and the most valuable consumers for viral marketers are the ones that are most likely to discuss and share branded content online (Phelps et al., 2004; Hennig & Phillips, 2012). Recent studies suggest that 17.9 percent of Internet users share online video advertisements more than once a week and this particular group of sharers is responsible for 82.4 percent of total online video advertisement shares (Unruly, 2014).

In their exploratory research, Hennig and Phillips (2012) label active sharers of online videos as ‘viral video mavens’ lending their ideas from the better-known concept of ‘market mavens’, a term that was introduced by Feick and Price in 1987. As defined by Feick and Price (1987:85), market mavens are “individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information”. It is important to note that market mavens differ from opinion leaders and early purchasers, where experience and knowledge is based on involvement with the product, product category or purchase experience (Feick & Price, 1987). However, market mavens do not have to possess product specific expertise or even experience of using it (Feick & Price, 1987).

Traditionally, the discussions initiated by market mavens have taken place in the offline world. The modern equivalent, viral mavens, has been discussed by only few researchers, such as Phelps (2004), who studied active forwarders of e-mails and Hennig and Phillips (2012), who focused on active forwarders of online videos. As Ho and Dempsey (2010) note, the term market maven describes the type of information that is shared (i.e. market information) and the new dimension introduced by the term viral maven includes a channel through which information is collected and shared (i.e. the Internet).

Interestingly, Hennig and Phillips (2012:142) describe viral video mavens as “the retailers of an online video distribution chain” as opposed to manufacturers and wholesalers. This fitting metaphor derives from their finding that viral video mavens are not necessarily active producers of online videos (i.e. manufacturers) and do not sort out vast amounts of unsolicited videos to find the best ones to forward to their peers (i.e. wholesalers) (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). In fact, viral video mavens prefer

to have videos picked and presented to them by third parties, either through subscriptions or other websites and services (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). This is an important notion to marketers, who have to find a way for their messages to get through the advertisement clutter. As it seems that viral video mavens have certain outlets through which they encounter videos, marketers should take these into consideration.

Little is known about the demographics of viral mavens, but it has been suggested that the most brand and category involved consumers are also the ones who are most likely to engage in brand-related eWOM (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Chiu et al. (2007) suggest that extravert and open consumers, who score low in conscientiousness traits, are most willing to forward marketing messages. Interestingly, Phelps et al. (2004) reported that some of the viral mavens feel a strong sense of duty to forward content to their peers. According to Ho and Dempsey (2010) the amount of time spent consuming online content is a significant factor predicting eWOM. On the other hand, consumers, who only occasionally participate in the practice of consuming branded online content, are often referred to as 'infrequent senders' (Phelps et al., 2004). According to Phelps et al. (2004) infrequent senders often demonstrate a willingness to forward branded online content but receive less relevant online content than viral mavens. Moreover, they seem more selective in their forwarding behavior, carefully choosing the recipients for their messages (Phelps et al., 2004). As Phelps et al. (2004) suggest, along with viral mavens, infrequent senders are a potential distribution force especially if marketers can find ways for them to receive more relevant messages.

As research suggests, targeting and utilizing viral video mavens as a distribution force seems crucial for viral advertising campaigns (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). Also turning infrequent senders into viral mavens may offer new opportunities for marketers to spread their messages (Phelps et al., 2004). If each person, who receives the online content, shares it to at least two peers, the number of the message recipients will grow exponentially. On the other hand, if message recipients for some reason refrain from forwarding the content, the spread of the message will come to a halt (Hsieh et al., 2012). Thus, it is important for marketers to understand, which motivational factors influence consumers actively or infrequently engaging with branded online content,

which will be discussed in the following.

### **3.2.2 Motivational factors**

Ho and Dempsey (2010) argue that viral marketing campaigns are more likely to succeed if the content appeals to the motivational factors that drive consumption and forwarding behaviour. Among all motivations, probably the most discussed one is whether consumers are motivated by a regard for others. There are a number of researchers, who believe that concern for other consumers, which is closely related to the concept of altruism, is a key motivator of eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Chiu et al., 2007; Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) argue that altruistic motivations increase both the frequency of online platform visits and the number of comments written on them. Similarly the studies by Chiu et al. (2007) and Ho and Dempsey's (2010) support the notion that concern for others increases consumers' forwarding intention. The finding by Phelps et al. (2004) noting that some viral mavens feel a strong sense of duty to forward content to their peers suggests viral mavens perceive they are serving others. Moreover, viral mavens reported they would only forward a message that was either important or likely to be received favorably by others (Phelps et al., 2004) thus emphasizing their concern for providing relevant information to others.

Contrasting the earlier findings, Wolny and Mueller's (2013) study suggest that concern for others is not an important factor influencing the frequency of fashion brand-related eWOM. Additionally, consumers do not seem to frequently engage in eWOM in order to seek advice from others (Wolny & Mueller, 2013), which would suggest that eWOM is not used as a channel for giving or gaining help. Similarly Lee et al. (2013) found no support for altruistic motivations affecting consumers' attitudes toward passing along online video advertisements. According to Lee et al. (2013) consumers expressed no behavioral belief that passing along online videos would allow consumers to express love and concern for others and, therefore, this is not part of the assessment process for pass-along behavior.

Although research has produced mixing results in regards to altruistic motivations, there is general support for the argument that consumers appreciate the social benefits

gained through engagement with online content (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ho & Dempsey, 2010; Lee & Lee, 2012; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). In terms of online video views, Lee and Lee (2012) found that social interaction was one of the key motivators, which suggests consumers watch online video advertisements to build or enhance their social relationships. Also Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that social benefits have by far the strongest positive impact on the frequency of online platform visits and the number of comments posted. Similarly, Wolny and Mueller (2013) suggest that eWOM frequency and social benefits gained increase in line with each other. In sum, the more the consumer participates in the use of online content, the bigger the social gains. However, the results by Lee et al. (2013) suggest that the inclusion factor, which describes the participant's expectations about social benefits, plays no role in consumers' attitudes towards pass along behavior. Similarly Cha and Chan-Olmsted (2012) suggest that people are not likely to watch online videos for companionship.

Ho and Dempsey's (2010) results provide an interesting angle to the notion of social benefits being the strongest motivational factor. In their research, they divided the inclusion scale into two distinguished factors of 'individuation' and 'need to belong'. Interestingly, they found only partial support for the need to belong scale, which describes the individual's need to be accepted and recognized by others (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Instead, the individuation scale, referring to individual's willingness to stand out in a crowd, was much more likely to predict forwarding intentions (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). This result would hint that the most motivational social benefit gained from the forwarding practice was the sender's desire to identify themselves as different from, rather than similar to, others.

The difference in results could be explained by the fact that while Ho and Dempsey's (2010) study focused specifically on viral mavens, the participants in the studies by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Wolny and Mueller (2013) consisted of consumers who participate in eWOM on varying levels of activity and are not necessarily viral mavens. Additionally, Ho and Dempsey (2010) suggest the results could be explained by the fact that while viral mavens are signaling distinctiveness from others, they may hope that their behavior is perceived as altruistic by others. Thus, viral mavens may be motivated to engage in seemingly altruistic actions because they feel it is a way to



set themselves apart from the crowd.

The notions by Ho and Dempsey (2010) are supported by Wolny and Mueller's (2013) finding, which suggests that self-involvement, the need to be recognized as some type of opinion leader, is an important motivational factor of eWOM. Although social benefits were found to be the strongest motivator of eWOM, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that extraversion/positive self-enhancement, which describes an individual's personal need to share positive emotions with others and to receive positive recognition from others, was the second most motivating factor increasing the frequency of online platform visits. This factor differs from social benefits in that the individual is more motivated to establish their social status instead of trying to belong to a social group. The above-mentioned findings suggest that seemingly altruistic motivations might sometimes have socially inflicted motivations behind them.

In addition to gaining social benefits, also social expectations and norms may dictate eWOM activities for the members of certain social groups. Lee et al. (2013) found that both attitude and subjective norm are significant predictors of the intention to pass along online video advertisements. Subjective norm, which describes the perceived social pressure to engage in certain behavior, had a positive impact on attitude, which positively correlated with pass along intention (Lee et al., 2013). Subjective norm is an interesting motivational factor especially because in the online setting, the significant others that create the social pressure are also the recipients of the pass along messages from the consumer in question (Lee et al., 2013).

In terms of independent needs, Lee et al. (2013) noted that pleasure and escape positively affected consumers' attitudes toward pass along behavior, which in turn led to greater likelihood of actually forwarding online video advertisements. In other words, consumers believed that forwarding online video advertisements would result in feelings of pleasure and escape, which motivated them to engage in such behavior. Similarly watching online video advertisements was motivated by escapism-pass time factor (Lee & Lee, 2012). This suggests consumers believe that watching online video advertising offers them a break from daily routines and helps them to occupy their time (Lee & Lee, 2012). Consumers that are highly motivated by escapism-pass time

factor are more likely to actively search websites for online video content and less likely to come across online video advertisements by chance (Lee & Lee, 2012). According to Lee and Lee (2012), consumers that are highly motivated to watch online video advertisements based on social relaxation, information, escapism-pass time and entertainment motivations prefer to visit online media platforms requiring active participation. Such platforms include video-sharing websites, social networking sites, brand websites and portal/news websites (Lee & Lee, 2012). What this means is that consumers driven by certain motivations tend to visit particular online media platforms more. Interestingly, Lee and Lee (2012) noted that the preference for using video-sharing sites was especially high among consumers highly motivated by entertainment needs.

Contrasting the findings by Lee and Lee (2012), the study by Cha and Chan-Olmsted (2012) claims that watching online videos is not significantly motivated by the possibility of escape. Instead, Cha and Chan-Olmsted (2012) found that timely learning and relaxing entertainment were the most salient motives for watching online videos. Also Lee and Lee (2012) found these two factors to motivate online video views. However, Lee et al., (2013) suggest that consumers do not perceive relaxation as a likely outcome for forwarding online videos and therefore this does not motivate pass along behaviors. These contrasting results between specific factors for watching and forwarding online videos would suggest that watching and forwarding of online videos are motivated differently.

In their research Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) divide consumers into various clusters based on different types of motivational factors. They suggest that there exists four segments of consumers who participate in eWOM and each is motivated differently. Self-interested helpers are motivated by economic incentives, multiple-motive consumers rank high across different motivational factors, consumer advocates are mostly motivated by their concern for other consumers and true altruists provide a helping hand to both other consumers as well as companies (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Out of these segments, the multiple-motive consumers are most active participators of eWOM and visit online platforms most frequently (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Interestingly, consumers driven by altruistic motivations contributed the least to eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). From the marketer's point of view, the

identification of various motivational segments suggests that marketers need to address each individual segment differently.

### **3.2.3 Emotional impacts**

A number of researchers have suggested that emotions play a major role in determining viral success (Dobele et al., 2007; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Botha & Reyneke, 2013). This line of research suggests that marketers should strive to evoke such emotions that are more likely to motivate consumers to consume and share branded online content. Researchers argue that successful viral campaigns link emotion to the message (Dobele et al., 2007). Studies regarding emotions in viral marketing are closely related to message characteristics. However, the emotions experienced by the consumers are not under the full control of marketers and the same content may evoke different emotions in two different consumers. Thus, emotions will be discussed under sender and receiver characteristics.

As Eckler and Bolls (2011) note, viral marketing is often more about the emotional impact than the product itself. The main focus is in the online content, which must capture consumers' attention (Porter & Golan, 2006). According to Botha and Reyneke (2013) consumers need to form an emotional connection with the online video before they pass them on to their friends and family. Moreover, marketers must also make sure that the content captures the recipient's imagination in a unique and memorable way (Dobele et al., 2007). This line of thought would suggest that emotions evoked by the online content are the key determinant of viral success. Although specific emotions experienced by an individual cannot be pre-determined by the marketer, mapping out potential emotions experienced by the target audience could be useful for the marketers. Interestingly, Botha and Reyneke (2013) argue that emotional contagion can take place also in the online setting. The idea of emotional contagion is an interesting one; this would suggest that an individual's positive or negative emotion could be passed on to their peers thus creating a premise for the emotions of others in the network.

Botha and Reyneke (2013) observed that consumers with a positive emotional connection to an online video are more likely to pass it along than viewers who had a

negative or no emotional connection to the video. This would suggest that any emotional connection is better than no connection at all. However, positive emotions seem to work better than negative ones. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that consumers motivated by negative feelings seem to visit online platforms less frequently for the purpose of sharing their experiences than consumers motivated by positive feelings. This finding is interesting as it disproves the general assumption of eWOM being mainly driven by negative emotions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Dobele et al. (2007) distinguish between five emotions, including joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust or bad taste, that all are suitable for different types of firms and viral campaigns. They suggest that viral marketing campaigns conveying emotions of joy are suitable for fun, contemptuous or mature brands. On the other extreme, sadness works well for immediate social causes such as natural disasters. Viral marketing campaigns evoking anger are best suited for unique ideological or political campaigns, which seek immediate action to combat injustice. According to Dobele et al. (2007) extreme caution should be used when evoking fear through viral marketing. However, social campaigns, such as opposing drunken driving, might benefit from elements of fear if combined with a solution, such as designated drivers. Because sadness, anger and fear are all passing emotions, they are better suited for campaigns requiring only short-term commitment. Lastly, Dobele et al. (2007) argue that viral marketing campaigns surrounded around disgust or bad taste have a very specific segment: young males, rebellious brands and cultures, where disgusting incidents are considered humorous. Unsurprisingly, men are more likely than women to forward content that conveys fear, bad taste or disgusting humor (Dobele et al., 2007). Dobele et al. (2007) also suggest that the experience of fear in online advertisements is stronger among females than males. (Dobele et al., 2007)

Despite supporting the importance of emotions, Botha and Reyneke (2013) noticed that the content was the first determinant for forwarding behavior. Moreover, they found an interesting relationship between specific content and general content, content familiarity and emotions. As Botha and Reyneke (2013) observed, when the content was universal or general (no previous knowledge of the content required), participants assessed the videos in terms of their emotional impact. However, when the content was specific (requiring previous knowledge of the content), the

participants first assessed the relevance of the video and emotional reaction was only the second determinant for sharing the video (Botha & Reyneke, 2013). In terms of specific content, the researchers noted that, when consumers were familiar with the content, the emotional reaction to the video was stronger (Botha & Reyneke, 2013).

In sum, previous research on sender and receiver characteristics has focused on personality traits, motivational factors and emotional impacts. Previous researchers have labeled active sharers of online video content as viral video mavens, who are considered as the retailers of online video distribution chain. Knowledge regarding specific demographics is scarce but studies suggest that extravert and open consumers, who score low in conscientiousness traits, are most willing to forward online messages. Understanding viral video mavens is crucial as studies argue that only 17.9 percent of Internet users is responsible for 82.4 percent of total online video advertisement shares.

Additionally, studies have argued that viral marketing campaigns are more likely to succeed if the content appeals to the motivational factors that drive consumption and forwarding behaviour. Studies argue that concern for others, social benefits, individuation, subjective norm and independent needs are strong motivational factors driving consumption and diffusion of online content. Researchers also claim that successful viral campaigns link emotion to the message. Consumers with a positive emotional connection to an online video are more likely to pass it along than viewers with negative or no emotional connection. Moreover, various emotions, such as joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust or bad taste, are all suitable for different types of firms, audiences and campaigns.

### **3.3 Social network characteristics**

Lastly, studies suggest that the characteristics of a social network significantly influence the success of a viral campaign (Bampo et al., 2008; Liu-Thompkins, 2012). In comparison to the message and sender and receiver characteristics, research on social network characteristics has been scarce. Yet, according to researchers both the network structure and an individual's position within the network affect the reach and influence of viral marketing (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). In terms of the network structure, researchers have discussed how networks are organized and which ones

serve best the diffusion of viral messages. Individual's position in the network, on the other hand, describes the consumer's relationship with others and builds on factors such as network centrality and tie strength.

Especially the selection of initial seeds seems crucial to the spread of online messages (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). Firstly, researchers have discussed the trade-off between low costs and high number of initial seeds targeted. In their research for the diffusion of viral videos Liu-Thompkins (2012) found that the number of seeds positively correlates with the message diffusion. However, need for a 'big-seed' strategy diminishes as the video quality improves (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). Thus, emphasis on message quality seems crucial as it lowers the requirements for the initial amount of seeds required to diffuse the content.

Additionally, tie strength between the consumer and the marketer positively correlates with viral diffusion (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). Wolny and Mueller (2013) support this by suggesting that the most brand and category involved consumers, which hints at a better tie-strength, are most likely to engage in eWOM. Interestingly, although a large number of network connections equals large reach potential, the findings by Liu-Thompkins (2012) suggest that targeting a consumer with the largest network may not always be the best approach. This follows from the observation that maintaining a large number of connections leads to weaker average connections and limited influence on the subsequent connections (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). Therefore, it would seem ideal for a marketer to target several seeds that have high quality connections rather than just a high amount of weak connections.

In terms of the network structure, Bampo et al. (2008) suggest that scale-free networks are more ideal for the diffusion of messages than random or small world networks. In scale-free networks consumers are directly linked to a significant proportion of others while having a moderate number of connections. On the other hand, random networks consist of, as could be expected, random connections with no identifiable hubs (Bampo et al., 2008). Lastly, small world networks are tightly linked neighborhoods with limited amount of participants (Bampo et al., 2008). The downfall of random and small world networks is that they hinder the spread of messages as both the absence of clusters and presence of too tight clusters means the

message will fade out quickly. Interestingly, Bampo et al. (2008) note that the network structure has less impact when using a large number of initial seeds. According to Liu-Thompkins (2012), marketers are more likely to succeed in the diffusion of an online message, when a large number of easily influenced people rather than a small number of highly connected hubs, are targeted. Interestingly, moderate heterogeneity in the network will work more favorably for viral marketing than having people, who share too few or too many interests (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). More specifically, only one-fifth of overlap in interests provides most potential for the diffusion of viral videos (Liu-Thompkins, 2012).

Mochalova and Nanopoulos (2014) suggest a targeted approach to viral marketing, which combines the best aspects of viral and traditional targeted advertising. According to them, marketers often choose to spread their initial viral marketing messages to seeds that are globally central in the network (Mochalova & Nanopoulos, 2014). This refers to consumers, whose centrality is high within the whole social network, and therefore they can be considered to be the most influential initial seeds (Mochalova & Nanopoulos, 2014). However, as previous studies have shown, the influence propagation on social networks often takes place between consumers or 'nods', which are in close proximity (Cha et al., 2009). Thus, the consumer who is globally most central in the network might not be the one closest to consumers, who are the most potential audience for that particular content. For instance, some online videos might have a very specific audience, and therefore the distance from the globally central consumer (initial seed) to the potential audience (message target) might prove to be too long.

Thus, to avoid premature failing of diffusion, Mochalova and Nanopoulos (2014) argue that marketers should focus on local centrality, which identifies seeds that are most likely to reach the potential audience. The benefit of using local centrality is that marketers can target seeds that belong to the potential audience and are likely to have a positive attitude toward the message (Mochalova & Nanopoulos, 2014). While global centrality always suggests similar seeds for each individual marketing campaign, local centrality varies based on the marketer's definition of the target market (Mochalova & Nanopoulos, 2014). Local centrality outperforms global centrality especially in networks where users are somewhat reluctant to activate their

social ties, there is negative or indifferent attitude toward the message, the initial seed size is small or when only a few potential customers are identified (Mochalova & Nanopoulos, 2014). Although local centrality demands previous knowledge about the network, studies argue that it produces good results already with relatively low number of potential customers identified (Mochalova & Nanopoulos, 2014).

Interestingly, recent research by multi-screen video advertising technology company YuMe (2014) argues that the device used to view online video advertising is a more important factor affecting attention than mood, location or content genre. Among various platforms, smartphones seem to arouse more viewer attention than tablet or PC (YuMe, 2014). A study conducted among US Internet users showed that 64 percent of consumers, who were highly attentive while watching a pre-roll video advertisement on a smartphone, reported an intention to purchase the product (YuMe, 2014). For tablet only 56 percent and for PC 52 percent of highly attentive consumers expressed purchase intentions (YuMe, 2014). Although the study is not conducted with the rigour of an academic research, it highlights another interesting factor: the device used to watch online video advertising, which is not studied in the academic literature of viral marketing.

To summarize, researchers have argued that social network characteristics significantly influence the success of a viral campaign. Notably, the two important factors that have been addressed are network structure and the agent's position within a specific network. Studies suggest that scale-free networks are more ideal for the diffusion of messages than random or small world networks. Moreover, it is argued that moderate heterogeneity in networks and local centrality of initial seeds work best to diffuse the message and to reach the potential audience.



## 4. Practice theory

My theoretical lens for understanding how consumers consume viral videos in their daily lives is based on practice theory. Practice theory views consumption as an ongoing process, which takes place in the intersection of many practices and the everyday social situations (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). Moreover, practice theory allows researchers to analyse “ways of consuming and how these are entangled in webs of social reproductions and changes” (Halkier & Jensen, 2011:102). In other words, practice theory focuses on the daily practices that are carried out by consumers and guided by a social and cultural context.

Practice theory is a type of cultural theory and therefore rooted into theories of structuralism and semiotics, phenomenology and hermeneutics and the Wittgensteinian language game philosophy (Reckwitz, 2002). Within the realm of culture theories practice theory is closely related to the concepts of mentalism, textualism and intersubjectivism (Reckwitz, 2002). A major difference between cultural theories and other modern social theories lies in their perceptions of action and social order. The classical view of consumers as ‘homo economicus’ suggests that action is based on individual interest and objectives and therefore social order can be regarded as the combination of individual aspirations (Reckwitz, 2002). On the other hand, supporters of ‘homo sociologus’ view claim that action is conditioned by collective norms and values and social order is constructed by normative consensus (Reckwitz, 2002). However, from the viewpoint of cultural theorists, both theories of homo economicus and homo sociologus neglect the existence of tacit knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002). As suggested by cultural theorists, this unconscious part of social knowledge enables the symbolic organization of reality (Reckwitz, 2002). Moreover, the collective symbolic knowledge defines, which social action is desired or undesired and thus, explains both action and social order (Reckwitz, 2002).

Like many theories, practice theory is a rather dispersed theory that consists of a wide range of perspectives. However, practice theorists share the common interest in how social action is carried out and how actions are conditioned. The basic theoretical assumption of practice theory is that consumers constantly carry out various actions in

social life, which are structured by collectively shared practices (Halkier & Jensen, 2011).

One key step in understanding practice theory is to define the term 'practice'. According to a popular definition by Reckwitz (2002:249) a practice is "a routinized way of behaviour, which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". As defined by Schatzki (1996:89), practises can be considered as "temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings". In other words, a practice consists of both doings and sayings, which demands focus in both what people actually do and how they talk about it. Moreover, Schatzki (1996:89) recognizes three avenues through which the doings and sayings are linked: "1) through understandings, 2) through explicit rules, principles, precepts and instructions and 3) through what I will call 'teleoaffective' structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions and moods". In a later study, Warde (2005:134) shortens the components into simply "1) understandings, 2) procedures and 3) engagements". This study follows Schatzki's categorization by referring to the three elements as understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures.

Similar to Schatzki (1996), also Reckwitz (2002:250) highlights the common components that link sayings and doings in practices: "conventionalized 'mental' activities of understanding, knowing how and desiring are necessary elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates, not qualities of the individual". Therefore, the above-mentioned mental activities are in fact embedded in the practices themselves and are not specific to any individual. This assumption also allows the condition that practices can be observed and understood by others than the acting individual.

According to Schatzki (1996) practices can be regarded to be either dispersed or integrative. As their name suggests, dispersed practices can be found in various sectors of social life and examples of such practices include practices of explaining, questioning and ordering (Schatzki, 1996). Out of the three components that link doings and sayings, Schatzki (1996) defines understandings to be most crucial in

linking dispersed practices. The other two components, rules and teleoaffective structures, are only rarely present as the nature of dispersed activities often requires the absence of set principles and ends (Schatzki, 1996). On the other hand, integrative practices are linked by all of the three components and they are by nature more complex practices, which exist in specific domains of social life (Schatzki, 1996). For example business practices, cooking practices and religious practices are all considered as integrative (Schatzki, 1996). As pointed out by Warde (2005), sociology and especially sociology of consumption is more focused on studying integrative rather than dispersive practices. According to Schau et al. (2009) the interaction between practices can be either intrathematic or interthematic. The term intrathematic refers to interactions where thematically similar practices are combined to work together towards a shared thematic goal (Schau et al., 2009). On the other hand, interthematic interaction takes place when thematically differentiated practices work together (Schau et al., 2009).

Practice theory is a suitable theoretical lens for my study for several reasons. In their research of pass along email behaviours, Phelps et al. (2004) reported that there existed a strong understanding of etiquette. In other words, consumers shared an understanding, no matter how implicit it might be, of how the practice of passing along emails is carried out. Similarly the tendency to share particular types of online content suggests that consumers share a sense of how peer-to-peer diffusion of online information works. For instance, the respondents in the study by Hennig and Phillips (2012) expressed a concern for how their peers might view the content they shared in terms of its timeliness and interest value. This implies that social practices are at play on the consumer side of online video usage. Thus, this study suggests that the practice of consuming online videos can be viewed to have an established set of practices and marketers should strive to understand these practices in order to successfully carry out viral marketing. The following sections will further discuss key elements of practice theory, which will later help to understand my findings of online video consumption practices.

#### **4.1 Structure and agent in practice theory**

In order to understand practice theory, it is crucial to define how structure and agent are related to practices. In terms of structure, practices are seen as somewhat

identifiable entities, which support a certain level of regularity and repetition over time (Ropke, 2009). In fact, many of the practices that we conduct in our daily lives have become extremely routinized. According to Reckwitz (2002:250) “a practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood”. Moreover, structure is thought to exist in the “routine nature of action” (Reckwitz, 2002:255).

In regards to the role of the agent, practice theory views agents as ‘carriers’ of practices (Reckwitz, 2002). It is important to note that agents neither have complete autonomy over their actions but they also are not pre-programmed slaves, who merely follow a set of established rules and norms (Reckwitz, 2002). This approach contrasts the traditional focus on consumer as a privileged actor within consumer culture research (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). Within the scope of practice theory, consumers are considered as knowledgeable and competent practitioners (Warde, 2005), who understand the world and themselves, and use their know-how and motivational knowledge when carrying out practices (Reckwitz, 2002).

It is important to note that from the viewpoint of practice theory, individuals act as the intersection points for a plurality of practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005). As Reckwitz (2002:256) puts it, the individual can be seen as “the unique crossing point of practices”. What this means is that there exists a multitude of social practices and each individual carries a set of these. Moreover, individuals perform the same practice in a multitude of ways. As noted by Warde (2005), individuals may differ in their relation to three components (understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures) that link doings and sayings and this reflects into how the practice is performed. For example differences in experience, knowledge and learning may produce various ways of carrying out a practice such as cooking.

In terms of the role of the individual, Warde (2005) goes as far as suggesting that the postmodern phenomena labelled as ‘the fragmentation of the self’ can be explained by the individual’s participation in a multitude of diverse practices. Fragmentation may increase especially in situations, where the individual participates in social engagements that differ in their norms (Warde, 2005). Moreover, as the number and the internal complexity of practices increases, it becomes more and more difficult for

outside viewers to interpret the symbolic meanings that individuals wish to convey through their participation in practices (Warde, 2005).

## **4.2 Trajectory of practices**

The trajectory of a practice describes the history of how a specific practice came to be, evolved over time and, possibly, died out. Moreover, the history of a specific practice differs based on time, space and social context (Warde, 2005). In other words, the history of any practice, such as cooking, driving or consuming online video advertising, is shaped according to the characteristics that surround it. According to Warde (2005:140) this highlights “the social construction of practices, the role of collective learning in the construal of competence, and the importance of the exercise of power in the shaping of definitions of justifiable conduct”. In other words, the establishment and shaping of a practice is highly dependent on the social, collective and individual expressions of power.

Despite the structure and routines that exist in practices, it is evident that old practices die out and new ones emerge over time (Ropke, 2009). As described before, practices consist of a set of understandings, rules and teleoaffective structures, which, at any given time, can be regarded as somewhat established guiding codifications of how a practice is carried out. To carry out a practice often takes place without much awareness of these codifications, as practice is by nature a highly routinized activity. However, as established earlier in this paper, the performance of a practice varies. This follows from the fact that practitioners of a practice often have differing perceptions of what constitutes as the best way of conducting the practice (Warde, 2005).

According to Warde (2005), the trajectory of practices follows from their dynamic logic of operation. Reckwitz (2002:255) suggest that the change in existing practices and the introduction of new ones takes place in “the everyday crises of routines”. These views suggest that as consumers come across new situations, they are forced to alter their behaviour and thus change practices. Additionally, as each agent has a limited time to carry out practices, it can be thought that practices in fact compete over the time of the agent and practices that are no longer able to recruit new agents die out (Ropke, 2009). However, old practices are not usually completely replaced by

parallel new practices. Instead, old practices often lend ideas and procedures, which form an essential part of the seemingly new practice (Warde, 2005). Additionally, individuals have their own personal trajectories in relation to a specific practice (Warde, 2005). Warde (2005) claims that the trajectory of an individual's participation in a practice often resembles the features of a career. As noted by Warde (2005), it is also important to consider the process of abandoning practices and resistance towards being recruited to a practice.

### **4.3 Consumption as part of practices**

Notably, my approach into studying online videos and their use is firmly set on sociology of consumption. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon the consumption approach, as oppose to e.g. technological approach, of my study into the use of online videos. The following will briefly discuss consumption as part of practices and the role of things.

Warde (2005:137) defines consumption as “a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion”. It is important to note that consumption is not a practice of its own right but rather most practices include the consumption of products and services (Warde, 2005). In fact, things are often essential to carry out the practice in an intended way. As suggested by Warde (2005) the appropriation of an item takes place within the practice and the conventions of the practice guide what items are used and how they are put to use. Thus, behaviour is governed based on the conventions and standards of the practice (Warde, 2005). Moreover, it is not the individual choices and desires that create wants but rather it is the participation in practices, which leads to consumption (Warde, 2005). All in all, consumption takes place within and for the sake of the practice and the consumed items are put into use when carrying out practices (Warde, 2005).

As mentioned above, carrying out a practice often involves some kind of an item that is used in a certain way (see e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Shove & Panzar, 2005; Warde, 2005; Hand & Shove, 2007; Murphy & Patterson, 2011). For example to cook, one needs a variety of different things such as food items and kitchen utensils. In order to

consume online videos, one must obtain a device (such as smartphone, tablet, pc or similar), Internet connection to carry out the practice and, essentially, there has to be online videos. A number of researchers using practice theory in their studies have addressed the importance of things as essential parts of practices. For example, Murphy and Patterson (2011) studied the experience of dangerous motorcycling behaviour through practice theory. In their research, they had a special focus on the role the object, motorcycle, played in the practice. According to Murphy and Patterson (2011), the motorcyclists underwent a period of learning before they could enjoy and use the object to fully engage in the practice. However, once the rider has learned to master the motorcycle, the interaction between the object and the agent has significant impact on the actual performance of the practice (Murphy & Patterson, 2011).

In their study of how people live with freezers, Hand and Shove (2007:96) concluded that freezing is a “remarkably creative process involving the active and simultaneous integration of constitutive elements – including materials (food, freezers, kitchens); ideals and discourses (of economy, domesticity, proper provisioning, a good diet, etc.); skills and competences (in planning, cooking, shopping, etc.)”. Studies argue that scholars should view consumers not as users of products but rather as active practitioners (Shove & Panzar, 2005). Although essential to carrying out practices, things alone have very little value (Shove & Panzar, 2005). In fact, things are just one element, as practices are argued to consist of equipment, competence and images (Shove & Panzar, 2005). However, the main focus is in how these elements fit together as “the emergence and demise of practices have to do with forging and failing links between materials, images and skills” (Shove & Panzar, 2005:58). Thus, all of the constituent elements are necessary in carrying out practices.

## **5. Methodology**

My thesis is conducted as a qualitative research in the field of consumer behaviour. Data collection was organized through semi-structured individual interviews. This section will discuss my research approach and methods for collecting and analysing data. It will also shortly describe the study participants to provide background information.

### **5.1 Research approach**

Narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodology for my thesis as I am looking to uncover stories of lived practices about how the respondents consume online videos. Although narrative data collection is conducted on the level of individual interviews, narrative inquiry in general is interested in making sense of overall human action and human meaning (Polkinghorne, 1998). However, it has to be noted that narrative inquiry is interested in the individual's experience whereas the focus in practice theory is in social practices. Therefore, I am taking a realistic approach to narrative inquiry, which suggest that I am considering everything the study participants say as a realistic description of what happened. In doing so, I am focusing on how the respondents talk about their doings. In relation to the already mentioned concept of practices consisting of both doings and sayings, I am pursuing, through narratives or sayings, to uncover the doings of a practice.

As mentioned, the main focus in narrative inquiry is to uncover how humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In narrative inquiry, the object of observation is in individual stories and histories, which emerge through the construction of human narratives (Polkinghorne, 1998). According to Polkinghorne (1998), narrative is the principal form through which human experience is made meaningful. Additionally, Polkinghorne (1998) highlights that narratives consist of more than just events as they always entail the significance of these events for the narrator. Moreover, Polkinghorne (1988:36) suggests that the narrative scheme provides "a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole". In this sense, the use of narrative inquiry suits my study purpose, as the goal is to collect seemingly unrelated stories of



various activities related to the consumption of online videos and to translate these activities into meaningful practices.

While conducting a narrative inquiry, it is essential to notice that people are both constantly living their stories “in an on-going experiential text” but also telling stories of past events in words while reflecting upon their life and explaining themselves to others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990:4). As suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990:4) “a person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories”. A researcher must be aware of the complexity this brings about to narrative inquiry as the researcher themselves becomes a part of the narrative process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). At the end, two different narratives, provided by the participant and the researcher, merge into a shared narrative construction and reconstruction (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

## **5.2 Data collection method**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest unstructured interviews as one possible method for collecting data in narrative inquiry. All the interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured to ensure that discussion would focus on important key themes but at the same time, to allow the emergence of relevant new topics. The main goal for the interviews was to collect stories about the use of online videos in consumers’ everyday lives.

The interviews lasted for around 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted in the respondents’ homes or at a cafeteria. Before the interview the respondents were informed about the study purpose and initial screening was carried out to make sure that the respondents’ engagement in online videos was on a routinized level. In the beginning of the interview each interviewee was asked to freely describe their relationship to online videos. The responses provided for this initial question largely guided the following conversation as meaningful points were picked up for further discussion. The interviews were semi-structured and therefore the interviewees were encouraged to talk freely about any themes they wished to raise.

The interview data was collected in eight individual interviews with five female and three male participants aged between 19 to 32 years. As the focus is in identifying

practices, the interviewees had to demonstrate a strong routinized approach towards online video consumption. Lending from the terminology by Hennig and Phillips (2012), my study participants can be regarded to be viral video mavens. However, in the scope of my study, viral video mavens engage in several practices and not just sharing content to others, as Hennig and Phillips (2012) first defined the term. All of the respondents exhibited a routinized approach to consuming online videos and some carried out all of the identified practices, while others carried out only some of the practices. The interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling and networking with friends. The only requirement was that the agent actively engaged in the researched practice and was willing to discuss it. The following will shortly introduce the interviewees and provide background information about their relationship with online videos. The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy.

Helmi, 19, is most interested in informative videos about fashion and beauty. Helmi often uses the information gained from videos as basis for her purchase decisions. Most of her friends do not consume online videos actively.

Siiri, 21, has watched online videos actively for about three to four years. She enjoys watching makeup related videos and uses videos as basis for her purchase decisions.

Iines, 25, has consumed online videos actively for about three years. For her, online videos are mostly just entertainment and she enjoys watching funny videos that include animals. Despite her busy schedule, she finds time to watch online video every day, sometimes even during worktime.

Julia, 25, has consumed online videos actively for about four to five years. She mainly consumes funny animal videos and enjoys sharing and receiving videos. Julia often watches online videos together with her boyfriend.

Eetu, 25, has consumed online videos from the beginning of their emergence about ten to fifteen years ago. He enjoys consuming both informative and funny videos, and especially content that is related to his sport hobbies.

Samuli, 26, has actively consumed online videos for about five to six years. He mainly uses online videos to learn about music related topics, which is his dear hobby. Additionally, he enjoys watching videos that are funny or ideological.

Mette, 27, works in a digital media company and, thus, consumes a lot of online videos both during work and free time. According to her, it is sometimes difficult to separate the two. She mostly watches funny videos, especially the ones that include animals.

Joakim, 32, actively consumes both informative and entertaining videos. Especially videos relating to his many hobbies are of interest for him. Many of his friends consume online videos actively too and he often has discussions about online videos with them.

### **5.3 Data analysis method**

As discussed before, I took a realistic approach to analysing the stories provided by the study participants and regarded them as realistic descriptions of what had happened. In other words, I took the sayings of the respondents to be adequate descriptions of the actual doings. As my theoretical lens for understanding online video consumption comes from practice theory, the aim was to collect stories about the use of online videos and to organize these into meaningful practices.

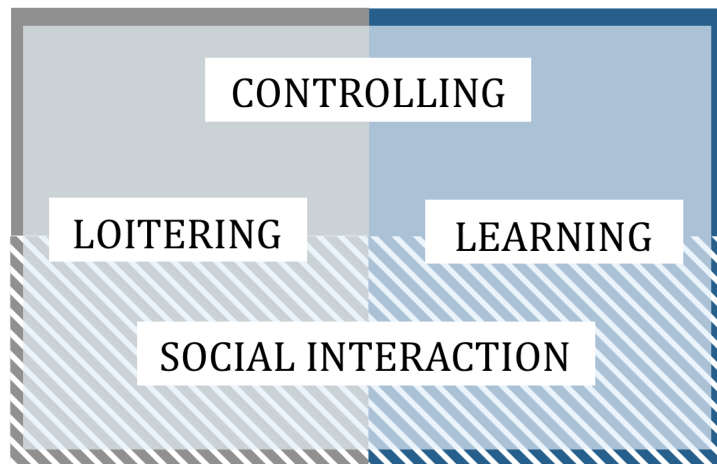
The analysis process began already after I had conducted few interviews in order to revise my interviewing technique. Additionally, I wanted to see if any themes were re-occurring so that I could incorporate them into the remaining interviews in case the respondents would not proactively raise these themselves. My data analysis process commenced with reading through the transcribed interviews multiple times and making initial notes about re-occurring themes. After this, I organized stories with similar themes into an Excel sheet. This way I was able to compare the stories provided by the respondents and evaluate, which themes are evident across the interview data. The four themes identified in my study emerged naturally from the interview data and the following analysis process was conducted to further establish them. This process was guided by practice theoretical implications, such as Schatzki's

(1996) description of practices as the nexus of doings and sayings, which are linked through understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures.

## **6. Findings**

In the following section I will present the key findings of my study. The findings consist of specific practices, which repeatedly came forth in the interviews with the study participants. The findings will be organized into four main themes: 1) loitering 2) learning 3) social interaction and 4) controlling. All of these themes describe various ways of using online videos. Notably, these topics serve as thematic headings for a group of specified practices. For instance, under social interaction, I will introduce practices that essentially include the use of online videos socially with other agents. Moreover, my categorization is based on the observation that certain practices occur together more often than they do with others. In other words, individual practices seemed to naturally form groups that revolved around one of the four main themes. Moreover, the shared understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures will be discussed under each theme. My arrangement of findings lends from previous research by Hand and Shove (2007), who organized their findings regarding freezer related practices in a similar thematic manner.

To better understand the relationships between the identified thematic groups of practices, I have comprised a framework. The framework works as a basis for my findings as it highlights the notion that practices are overlapping and intertwined between the four themes. Moreover, it indicates the scope of each thematic group of practices. Based on my interview data, loitering and learning did not extensively overlap with each other. They are the basis of the framework and are indicated as different colours. Although loitering and learning could be performed individually, social interaction always consisted of either collective loitering or learning. Therefore, social interaction overlaps with the previous themes and is depicted as downward diagonal pattern over loitering and learning. Finally, my findings suggest that loitering, learning and social interaction always included activities that allowed consumers to control their online video consumption. Thus, controlling is indicated as a sheer light blue colour over all the other themes.



**Figure 2: Framework of relationships between practices**

As guided by my practice theoretical approach, it was important to establish the use of online videos as a routinized manner of behavior. As noted earlier, consumption is not a practice of its own right but rather most practices include the consumption of things (Warde, 2005). In the scope of my research, the consumption of online videos is essential to carry out related practices. Some of the respondents carried out all of the identified practices but others were more specific about their use of online videos and engaged in only some of the practices. However, all of the identified practices essentially included the consumption of online videos, were commonly occurring and carried out by the majority of respondents. Routine in using online videos was evident in all of the interviews. The following stories by Joakim and Mette appropriately describe how online videos are an essential part of the interviewees' daily lives:

*Joakim: Often I go through the same routines every day: I read the news, then I watch the news from Amppari, I watch the news on Reddit and then in the evening, when everything has sort of been done during the day, then I might still go to Youtube and see what suggestions it offers from my channels.*

*Mette: I'm like 24/7... Well, not quite 24/7. For instance, I'm on Facebook and practically also on YouTube throughout the whole workday. So in a way, I'm constantly open for it.*

It can be seen from the interviewees' stories that online videos are strongly embedded in their everyday lives. Joakim even uses the word 'routine' to describe his use of online videos throughout the day. It seems that Joakim has somewhat specific times of the day when he consumes online videos and online video consumption has become a highly routinized activity to him. Mette's story relates well to the constant availability of online videos that is not restricted by time or place. This unlimited access and the vast amount of online videos available allows online videos to be actively embedded in consumers' everyday lives.

The following will organize the findings under four themes that were most evident in the interview data. Moreover, the practices all consist of a wide set of doings and sayings that are linked by the underlining understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures, which are regarded as somewhat established guiding codifications of how a practice is carried out. Carrying out a practice often takes place without much awareness of these codifications by the acting agent. However, my research attempts to describe these shared understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures that emerged from the respondents' stories. All of these will be identified and discussed under each theme. Additionally, I will present stories by interviewees, who best articulated the processes evident across the entire interview data. Finally, I will conclude my findings into a table of online video consumption practices.

## **6.1 Loitering**

The first identified thematic group of practices is labelled as loitering. In this study, the thematic term loitering refers to practices, which require little effort from the agent and are non-exhausting. Moreover, loitering essentially includes the socially shared understanding of online videos as pure entertainment. This theme introduces the specific practices of unwinding and killing time that include the consumption of online videos. Unwinding was a common practice, which took place after an exhausting activity, such as working or studying, to detach the agent from the previous activity. Moreover, consumers engaged in short periods of unwinding between various exhausting activities. In addition to unwinding, the respondents described their consumption of online videos as an activity of killing time. Killing time differs from unwinding in the sense that it consist of consuming time for the

simple reason that every agent has to spend their time doing something. In the scope of my study, both of these practices essentially incorporated the use of online videos.

It was evident across the interview data that online video consumption is often among the first things the interviewees do once they get back home from work or studies. This is the time of the day when the activities change crucially as agents move from an exhausting activity to free time. Many of the respondents described this process as unwinding from the previous activity. The stories by Joakim and Iines represent the general responses provided by the interviewees:

*Joakim: When I do watch them, then it is after work. Either immediately after I get home from work and there is that sort of a blue hour... so either then or at the same time when you are unwinding at the couch. Or in the evening, say, before going to sleep, few hours before going to sleep. It's a basic ADHD life that there's a telly in the background and you're on your laptop and then you may even do something with your smartphone at the same time.*

*Iines: But when I get home so then I usually, well unless I have something like now I have to... well, in fact, almost always even though I have something like I have to do something by tomorrow or study for an exam for tomorrow, but always when I get home I sit in front of the computer for a while. And then I just browse something like, well, probably Facebook again. Well, just now when I got home, I went to play with Nelson and then logged into Facebook for a moment. Yeah, and I just watched videos.*

For Joakim, consuming online videos takes place either immediately after he gets home, during the 'blue hour' (the moment when sun sets), or sometime later, while unwinding on the couch or before going to sleep. Also other interviewees described that they were used to consuming online videos either immediately or shortly after they got home. They often referred to this activity as something that would not require any thinking as opposed to work and studies, which often require active thinking. Interestingly, Iines explains that she would spend time consuming online videos even



when she would have something more pressing to do with her time, such as studying for tomorrow's exam. Ines was among the interviewees, who mainly consumed online videos that were trivial, and although she leads a busy life combining work and studies, she manages to find time to watch online videos daily. Her story strongly suggest that consuming online videos is a very routinized activity that takes place in spite of other routines that must be carried out even when they would be more pressing.

Despite the fact that as a student Ines' workday does not always finish when her classes end, she frequently consumes online videos after she gets home. It was evident in the interview data that unwinding can also take place in between the same activity. Many of the respondents admitted they engaged in moments of unwinding through the consumption of online videos even at the workplace, if they had the chance to do so. This was often done quietly and in secret so that the customers or colleagues would not notice. This suggests that the respondents are aware of online video consumption at work time being against the company policy and socially frowned upon. Yet many of the respondents admitted watching online videos during workday, especially when they directly received videos from others. Some said they would often assess how long the video is and if they could take up that time from their work and might watch it after work if watching was not possible at the time. This would then postpone consuming the online video until they got home. It would seem that loitering challenges the explicit rules of working, which demand that the agents focus their time on appointed tasks instead of trivial activities. To have a break between exhausting activities or to disentangle the agent completely from these were identified as key teleoaffective structures guiding unwinding.

In addition to unwinding, many of the respondents referred to their consumption of online videos as killing time. This was often associated with nothing else to do and simply passed available time in a day. Joakim discusses his approach to killing time through consuming online videos:

*Joakim: It's sort of just like, killing time. It's like when you have nothing else; you become sort of a Roman emperor being like "entertain me". Like here I am, what do you have to offer?*

(...)

*Most of it is something like, for example if it is an animal video, it is just like 'my dog did this today'-type of a video. And then there are so many of them that you probably don't use a single brain cell in the process of scrolling through them. So it is sort of like, they just turn up.*

As can be seen from Joakim's story, he often consumes online videos when he has nothing else to do. Notably, killing time represents an activity that requires very little thinking and similar to unwinding, the content is described as somewhat trivial. Based on the interviewees' stories, it was evident that the main teleoaffective structure that guides killing time is to combat boredom. Interestingly, online videos were noted to serve a similar purpose as traditional television. Eetu discussed online videos and television consumption as killing time, which captures the notions provided also by other respondents:

*Eetu: It [entertainment] is easy to look for from there [in online videos]. So basically if something comes up, for me it is the traditional cat video, so the internet service offers you directly a hundred more funny cat videos on the side, where it is easy to click on the next one and even jump from one topic to another. And then basically, you watch them all in a row. So if you start watching a program on telly, some program where there's something funny so then there's always that... Take 'Vain elämä' for example, there's about six performances in one and half hours. And then the rest of it focuses on something completely different. So then it isn't so funny anymore. In my mind, if you just want to think about it in terms of entertainment, they spend a lot of time on everything else. On the other hand, there [in online videos] if an advertisement pops up in the middle, on the top of everything, you can just skip it after a few seconds. It's so much faster.*

As can be seen in Eetu's story, online videos have challenged other traditional media, such as television, in assisting people to pass time. Also other interviewees made a notion about killing time watching either traditional television or online videos. Notably, it seems that online videos allow more control than traditional television as

the consumer has more influence both over the progression and content type. All of the respondents engaged in different activities to control the watching process of a single video, which will be discussed further later in the findings. What is crucial in regards to the practice of killing time is that online videos seem to be taking up time from another routinized practice for passing time - television watching. As Eetu's story would suggest, this could be a result of online videos allowing more control than television, thus making them more attractive. As discussed earlier in this paper, each agent has a limited time capacity to carry out practices, which leads to different practices competing over the agent's time (Ropke, 2009). However, old practices are not usually completely replaced by parallel new practices as ideas and procedures are often lent from older practices (Warde, 2005). It would seem that online videos are a fitting example of the trajectory of practices, where new developments in technology lead to changes in existing practices, such as killing time.

Notably, both unwinding and killing time were linked with the consumption of funny and entertaining videos. When the respondents talked about what they considered as funny and entertaining, one category, animal videos, was by far the most frequently mentioned one. Especially animal videos portraying cats and dogs were popular among the respondents, some of which had joined a popular but closed group *Eläinvideokerho* (a group where animal videos are shared) on Facebook to receive animal themed videos. As depicted by Joakim, this type of content requires very little, if any, thinking and therefore serves well the activities of unwinding and killing time. It was evident that the interviewees describing their loitering practices shared a social understanding of online video consumption as a trivial and low-involvement activity, where online videos are seen as pure entertainment. In addition to animal videos, which are mostly user generated, some interviewees recalled consuming marketer-produced videos that had been exceptionally funny. However, many of the respondents expressed that it is rare to discover funny videos that are marketer-produced. Moreover, user generated content was generally considered as more authentic than marketer-produced.

In addition to consuming specific types of videos, the processes of unwinding and killing time often coexisted with the process of passive discovery of new videos. Earlier, Joakim describes his approach to killing time: "you become sort of a Roman

emperor being like “entertain me”. Like here I am, what do you have to offer?” This passive approach to discovering online videos was evident in other respondents’ stories as well. It seems that the interviewees shared a social understanding that, when loitering, they were in the position to take the backseat and to have entertaining videos cherry picked and delivered for them by someone else. It was evident across the interview data that this social understanding was essential for carrying out loitering in a specific manner. Facebook was among the favorite sources for passively discovering new videos and many of the respondents said they followed specific groups or sites, such as BuzzFeed (Internet news media site) or the above-mentioned Eläinvideokerho, because they offered pre-selected videos.

Passive discovery is interesting in the sense that the respondents allow others to determine a set of options from which they, often seemingly randomly, pick a video to watch. Although some of the respondents had made a somewhat active decision to follow channels such as BuzzFeed, these sources offer a wide range of funny and entertaining videos. Additionally, it is an essential purpose of sites like BuzzFeed to put forward a wide variety of entertaining content. Moreover, the respondents did not actively look for any specific videos but preferred to scroll through the supply of videos for example on their Facebook newsfeed. Therefore, passive discovery refers to the process where the agent takes minimal action to discover new videos and prefers to have videos picked and delivered for them by other parties. Interestingly, the initial option may also lead to watching numerous other videos that are somehow related to the first one as depicted by Samuli:

*Samuli: Then there’s this random... sometimes you do the similar thing you would do with a TV, just browsing through channels. And then it might be that first you go somewhere to watch some video, for example when you open YouTube there may be some videos immediately on the main page, just some completely silly video clip. Then you just open it and then you just continue browsing onward. It’s like ‘check your brains at the door’ type of activity.*

*(...)*

*For example in France, I don’t recall the name of this guy, but one day, it’s been awhile... It’s a French guy, who performs practical jokes in*

*public places. And they vary greatly from one to another. And then I just began watching, like I watched the first clip because it was on the main page of YouTube. And then I just moved forward in watching. It wasn't necessarily even the same guy, who had uploaded these videos, they came from several sources. And then YouTube collects similar videos and suggestions on the side [column] when you have watched a video. Then you just moved onward from the side [column] and watched different clips. It was just a waste of time. It was just fun for that moment.*

The respondents described they would often spend long times, even up to hours, watching videos. Although not articulated by Samuli, some of other respondents used the word 'loop' to describe the activity of consuming videos in a successive manner. This successive consumption pattern was often encouraged by lists of similar videos accompanying the initial video of interest. For instance on YouTube, the channel suggests new videos based on recently viewed ones. Many of the respondent recalled times when they had unconsciously fallen into a loop of funny and relatively trivial videos after clicking on a relatively random video they had happened to come across somewhere. Especially the easy and quick availability of an unlimited selection of videos seemed to hook the interviewees somewhat addictively. This activity is another depiction of allowing videos come to the agent rather than the agent actively searching and choosing new videos, which was evident in the following thematic group. Moreover, passive successive consumption of online videos could be encouraged and accompanied by the agents' social relationships, which will also be discussed later in the findings.

## **6.2 Learning**

In addition to consuming online videos as loitering, many of the respondents discussed ways in which they used online videos as learning. The main difference with practices under loitering is that learning is a more demanding activity, which requires effort and involvement. Moreover, it is often more purposeful in nature than loitering as learning is engaged in with specific and more explicit short-term or long-term ends in mind. Similar to loitering, also learning can be entertaining. However, unlike in loitering, online videos are not considered as pure entertainment. In fact, the

socially shared understanding in learning is that online videos are a source of information.

Common doings identified under this thematic group included learning about products or current problems. The teleoaffective structures relating to these consisted of supporting complex purchase decisions or resolving a current problem such as how to tie a tie. These processes mainly consisted of short-term learning and included the consumption of very specific online videos. Additionally, many of the respondents engaged in long-term processes of learning about their hobbies and areas of interest. To gain deeper knowledge and to stay up-to-date were identified as relating teleoaffective structures. This long-term approach often incorporated the consumption of specific online videos from a limited amount of sources and the building up of relationships with the content creators. Seemingly, it is possible to engage in the process of learning while unwinding and killing time. However, based on the interview data, unwinding and killing time were not commonly associated with learning processes. Although learning does indeed pass time, the same could be said about working. Yet, it does not seem right to view working as killing time, which also applies to learning in the scope of my study. Thus, the processes of learning that include the consumption of online videos are discussed in the following.

The respondents told that they often seek information about specific products or product categories, problems, hobbies or other areas of interest. It seems that the different learning processes differ, not only in terms of their teleoaffective structures, but also in terms of their timespan. The practice of looking for specific product information to support a current purchase decision is often engaged in on a short-term basis. After the respondents observed that there was a need for a complex purchase decision they carried out a short-term learning process of possible options. On the other hand, some of the respondents had a general interest towards a hobby or some specific area of interest. In that case, the learning process stretched over a longer period of time to gain deeper knowledge or to stay up-to-date about new developments. This distinction between short-term and long-term learning processes is depicted well by Joakim:

*Joakim: And then technology is just that I like to stay up-to-date about what is going on because it interests me and is somewhat close to my work. That whole genre. But maybe it's more about just not falling out-of-date or that you don't get stuck too much. There are many things that I don't mind falling out-of-date but in some things that I know of... Well, this is related to headphones but I'm interested in staying up-to-date of what is going on and how those evolve and what is considered as good nowadays. Because I know that I'm always going to update those things within a specific cycle. I'm going to be faced with a purchase decision at some point anyway so either you already have a knowledge base or you start from zero. And I just bought a new TV so I had to start from zero again because I had no idea... I knew that there are all these 3Ds and bits and bobs these days but then I realized that it is such a workload like that whole... There's a hell of a lot of them and it's quite impossible to make any comparisons so it's almost compulsory to first reduce consideration into few and then watch videos about what people say about these. And then maybe a few more were added to the group of options. But in any case you have a feeling like it might be one of these and then someone says that this is good, by the way, this one that you had yourself picked. And then you are like, alright fuck it, this is it now.*

Joakim has a general interest in technology and follows certain product groups on the long-term, such as headphones, because they interest him. However, he is also acting proactively to support his purchase decisions on the long run. He says that he knows he will be faced with a purchase decision sometime in the future so he might as well do the background research over time. The whole genre is of general interest to him and therefore he uses online videos to stay up-to-date about technological changes. Many of the respondents consumed online videos on the long-term that related to their hobbies, such as music and sports, or other general interests, such as education and cooking. Some of the respondents would follow, for example, sports videos, which covered the overall lifestyle including training, nutrition and mindset. In sum, the content consumed on the long-term consisted of hobbies or other specific areas of interest, which were guided by the teleoaffective structures of gaining deeper knowledge or staying up-to-date.

In addition to looking for long-term information, the respondents used online videos on the short-term to learn about products or current problems. Notably, products and current problems could relate to hobbies or areas of interest. For example in terms of cooking, the respondents could check a specific technique while preparing dinner. However, it is the length and scope of the activity, which makes it fall to the category of short-term information seeking. The topics that were mainly consumed on short-term were issues, which required an immediate answer. Most of the respondents recalled checking for example how to change a tire for their bike. When faced with having to buy a new television, Joakim explains that he had no previous knowledge about or interest in this specific product category and had to start his decision making process from zero. He then used online videos on a short-term basis to gain more information about different options to support his purchase decision.

In the case of loitering, the respondents preferred to take the back seat and just wait to have interesting videos presented to them. In contrast, when the consumers engaged in the above-mentioned processes of learning, they were looking for very specific information. Therefore, in contrast to passive discovery, the processes within learning mainly coexisted with active discovery of new videos. In other words, the socially shared understanding was that the content consumed in learning is picked and delivered by the agents themselves, not some other parties. The active discovery of informational videos is well depicted by Siiri and Samuli:

*Siiri: If I'm thinking about buying something I go to YouTube and do a search with that product name and I watch those videos, how people have reviewed them. Maybe I just always would like to know more and specifically about what these people think about a particular product. What other people think about it influences my purchase decisions greatly.*

*(..)*

*For example, if I'm in a store and I see a product there, this mostly applies only to cosmetics, and I'm a little unsure about the product then I usually try to look for information online and sometimes I even watch a video, where they show how it looks on someone. Like how it really looks like.*



*Samuli: If I'm looking for a specific type of a video, then usually before I select it... then it has a big influence how much it has received points from other viewers, if other videos are easily available for this specific topic. So then I always choose the one that has received better reviews from users. So the number of views also influences a little. But in essence, it's more about how it has been reviewed. So I always give priority to how much it has received points from other viewers.*

Overall, when the interviewees actively looked for specific information to resolve their informative needs, new videos were often discovered through a key word search on sites such as Google or YouTube. Siiri's online video consumption mostly revolves around her interest in cosmetics and she often uses videos as a starting point for her purchase decisions. As can be seen from her story, rather than consulting a sales person, she may turn to online videos when faced with uncertainty while shopping. This is a good example of an active discovery process, which is carried out for the specific purpose of making a purchase decision. Moreover, as part of the process of actively looking for new videos, the respondents expressed regard for the careful selection of videos. Samuli was one of the respondents who mainly used online videos as learning and carefully selected videos when they were used as sources of information. To support his selection process, Samuli relies on the power of peer evaluation. For example on YouTube, it is possible for users to review a video through giving a thumb up or a thumb down for a video. Also the accumulated views for a specific video are displayed. Similarly other respondents said they would often use the reviews and the number of views to select between available videos of the same topic when engaging in learning. It seems that there is a general understanding suggesting that peer reviews and viewcount provide reliable information regarding the expertise and credibility of the source, especially when engaging short-term processes.

On the long-term, the relationship with the sources changed from the short-term point of view. When looking for videos on the short-term to make a current purchase decision, the respondents preferred to watch several videos from different sources to gain a comprehensive understanding about the product. Some of the respondents said that, while looking for specific information, if they came across an interesting

channel, they might start following it. This following might then turn into a deeper relationship, where one specific source of information might rise above all other sources and gain status as authority. This is depicted by Joakim:

*Joakim: There's this one guy, who only reviews albums and he has a similar music taste as I do. So if there's an album that I've liked or I wonder if others have liked it too, then I want to hear his opinion because it sort of has value to me too.*

*(..)*

*It influences how I experience the album, how I listen to it and if will I listen to it more critically. For instance, if he has liked about something completely different than what I liked, then I ponder if I might be wrong myself. So I do give him merit because he has earned his stripes as he has done it so much.*

Joakim's story is a great example of the long-term relationship that can be built between online video producers and users. The opinions provided by this specific channel do not only influence Joakim's purchase decisions but also reshape his consumption experiences. Music is a dear hobby to Joakim and he is also himself competent on this area. Despite his own experience, Joakim admits to even doubting his own taste when it clashes with the one demonstrated by this specific source. Similarly Siiri indicated in her story that the opinions of others in online videos influence her purchase decisions of cosmetic products greatly. Thus, the explicit rules provided by these sources in the form of product information and instructions are an essential part in learning about products through the consumption of online videos.

From a marketer's viewpoint, what is especially interesting in the stories by Joakim and others is the perceived source credibility and expertise the interviewees provide for the producers of online videos. It is evident from Joakim's story that one specific channel has gained a status as a trusted source of information, which in some cases may even cause him to doubt his own opinions. Also other respondents indicated that online videos have a strong influence on the decisions they make. Although none of the respondents admitted putting unconditional trust in online videos as a source of information, it is evident that online videos can be used as an effective way to

influence consumers' purchase decisions, consumption experiences and behaviour. Earlier, it was noted that there is a socially shared understanding of peer reviews and viewcount being reliable indicators of source expertise and credibility when engaging in short-term learning. In addition, it seems that on the long run, activity level and relationship with content creators are primary evaluative criteria used to determine source expertise and credibility. Thus, the socially shared understandings of perceived source credibility and expertise seem to vary between short-term and long-term learning processes.

### **6.3 Social interaction**

The previous sections discussed ways of consuming online videos as loitering and learning, where the focus was intentionally limited to describing practices that include a single agent. In addition to these above-discussed themes, all of the respondents engaged in social interaction, which essentially included the use of online videos. Previous research has argued that marketers must understand what triggers the need for consumers to share their experiences with others in order to successfully manage viral marketing (Phelps et al., 2004; Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). As noted earlier in this paper, practices are overlapping and integrative in nature and this is also evident under this theme. Based on my interview data, the processes of loitering and learning could be carried out in social interaction with others. It was evident in my interviews that the social use of online videos was an important practice that many of the participants carried out frequently. The following will discuss various ways in which the respondents used online videos in social interaction. In contrast to viewing online videos as entertainment or information, in this theme the socially shared understanding is that online videos are parts of social interaction.

As can be seen in the interview data, social interaction that includes online videos can take place both online and offline. It can be carried out between two agents or a larger group and can be either public or private in nature. Most of the respondents participated in various forms of social interaction and acted both as the initiator and the receiver. Julia provides an interesting example of a situation, where social consumption of online videos takes place offline between two agents:

*Julia: If during the day one has come across good videos and those have not been sent further then we may watch them together with my boyfriend when we get home in the evening. Then one is like oh I saw this, this and this today, you must see these. And then we start watching what the other one wants to show. Often my boyfriend has more videos because he is so active there. And then often when you see one video it reminds you of another one that has to be seen after it and so the loop continues.*

*(..)*

*And there we sit side by side on the couch and watch them [videos] from about seven to eight in the evening. It's the time when you've hanged out for a moment and reset your brains and then you can focus on everything futile. We often watch it [videos] on the same screen or sometimes we do so that we sit at opposite ends of the couch and we send them to each other on Facebook. And we watch them on two different devices at the same time if we're too lazy to move to be side by side on the couch. That's how we spend our evenings. [laughs]*

Julia and her boyfriend both consume online videos actively and often share their experiences with each other. As can be noted, the practice of unwinding is mentioned in Julia's story as having taken place already before social consumption so in this case it seems to be separate from the social process. On the other hand, the process reminds the practice of killing time, only now it is engaged in socially. Additionally, consuming online videos in a successive manner, in the so-called loop, is also present in the social consumption. In this case, both parties are familiar with consuming online videos on a regular basis and watching online videos seems to be one way of spending time as a couple. Part of the joy of online videos seems to be in the process of sharing them with someone who is likely to relate to the video as much as the sender does, which hints at a social understanding that online videos essentially provide shared joy. Overall, it would seem that online videos play an essential part in social relationships. Indeed, my study identified building and maintaining social relationships as key teleoaffective structures under the thematic group of social interaction.

Also other respondents told stories about situations, where they consume online videos in the presence of other people. Eetu, for example, organized an event for watching online videos with nine of his friends. This event was similar to the concept, where everyone brings their favourite song and people vote for the best one, which is familiar for many from the childhood. Only this time it was not songs but online videos, which were viewed and rated. Eetu talks about the event:

*Eetu: Just last week we organized 'album panel' with friends. So everyone chose one video and people didn't know which video was whose. And then we watched them together and voted for a winner. The idea for it came from how as a child everyone would bring a CD and then play their favourite song. So that seems a little old-fashioned these days so now there are videos. And it's something to do together too.*

Whereas the social consumption described by Julia takes place more spontaneously, Eetu's social gathering to watch online videos together refers to a more planned way of consuming online videos socially. Interestingly, it seems that a childhood game has been turned into an adulthood party game through a new way of appropriating things within practices. Notably, socially consuming videos together is a different experience from consuming videos alone as it allows the other participants to influence the type of videos that are watched and also allows the social interaction to take place immediately. Although most of the social consumption seemed to take place spontaneously, Eetu's story suggests that consuming online videos is such a widespread practice that everyone can be assumed to have a favourite video clip in a similar way they have a favourite song.

In addition to consuming online videos physically together, all of the respondents shared videos through the Internet. Online sharing was often carried out through instant messaging platforms, such as the one provided by Facebook, which is a private way of communicating between individuals and groups. Joakim describes his video sharing behaviour:

*Joakim: It may be that you watch some video and then it comes to your mind that hey, this person likes, for instance, funny animal videos. So then*

*I share it to them. Or that this person has had a bad day, they might cheer up from this. Or then often, those are just some inside [joke] things and then you remember that oh, this was discussed sometime and now this video happened to come across and this is related to that. It's seldom like, hey have you heard about this, this might benefit you. It's more about enjoying something together. And then you also hope for positive response and of course hope that the other one likes about what you send to them.*

Like Joakim, many of the respondents said that they would spontaneously send videos to other people. This process was often triggered by a previous discussion or an inside joke that somehow related to the video content the agent was consuming. Often the respondents would mention a certain group of people, such as partners, close friends and family, to whom they were accustomed to forwarding online videos. Similar to Joakim, many of the respondents said they only shared content they thought the receiver could relate to. Many expressed that they tended to share videos especially for the purpose of brightening up the receiver's day. This demonstrates a socially shared understanding of altruism and concern for others that essentially guides how the practice is carried out. In addition to building and maintaining social relationships, it seems that expressing love can be identified as an essential teleoaffective structure under social interaction practices.

It is evident in the stories by Julia, Eetu and Joakim that online videos are not only consumed alone but also widely shared with others. This suggests that people are exposed to videos, which they may not encounter themselves in their preferred channels of online video consumption or which they might not be initially drawn to. Thus, it would seem that the social consumption also significantly broadens the scope of online videos to which the agent is exposed to. Moreover, all of the respondents, who received videos directly from others, said that they would always at least browse through the video to see if it was anything of interest. Some of the respondents even indicated that they felt a pressure to watch the video if it was directly sent to them. The interviewees indicated that they would only send videos that somehow related to the receiver and this tailoring was also evident in the content the respondents themselves received. Sharing an online video to someone requires a sense of socially shared understanding about what is considered as interesting content not only by the

sender but, perhaps more importantly, by the receiver. The general approach to receiving online videos from others was well indicated by Iines:

*Iines: Well, I always open all of them [videos]. And usually they are pretty clearly pre-selected for me. Or I know that these have been pre-selected for me and they are pretty well targeted. Usually I do like them too, what I have received. In Facebook and elsewhere I skip a lot more videos but I don't think that I have ever not watched a video, which has been linked to me. And it's kind of nice to receive [videos] too. Or usually they... That's probably why it is so nice because usually they relate to me somehow and someone has thought about me.*

Interestingly, social media metrics tools do not capture many of the processes of social sharing. It seems that most of the social interaction takes place in a number of different ways other than just pressing the built-in share button. Moreover, at least in the scope of my study, public sharing in the online environment was not commonly practiced. Overall, the social sharing carried out by the participants was more private than public in nature. In public sharing, the shared content is visible to all followers of one's social media site, such as Facebook, and sometimes visible also to non-followers, which is the case for example on Twitter. In private sharing, the content is shared to a specific individual or a group. The respondents mentioned sharing content privately online e.g. through Facebook chat, Facebook groups, WhatsApp and email. The private sharing could also be described as targeted sharing, which adequately depicts the main difference between the two processes of sharing. In public, there is no control over who sees the shared content, whereas in channels with restricted access, the content is targeted to a specific individual or group that is likely to respond to the content favourably. Mette and Eetu discussed their use of targeted sharing:

*Mette: When I share it [a video] in a closed environment I don't have to think about what I'm going to say about this that much. So I'm just like hey, watch this, this is funny. And then if I share it on my Facebook wall and it stays visible there, then I share something that I know will stay there. And I'll have to think about how I say it and why, on the whole, this is such content that I wish all my Facebook friends to see. In the closed*

*group you can just be like, if you have five minutes, watch this. In a way it's much less of a hassle. And also in a smaller group you know that this is relevant to this group, to this small group to whom I'm sharing this now. There's quite little such content that would be relevant to all my Facebook friends. It's such a big group.*

*Eetu: It's very rarely that I'll share anything, like some video, publicly on Facebook for example. Or then it has to be really funny for me to do so. It's more like if a video reminds me of someone so then I may send that link to them - like watch this. Like I know they might think that this is funny. Or some discussion group on Facebook. You know that they think that this is funny and so you post it there. But somehow... as these days the information travels at such speed that when you're the fifth million person to watch that video it's very likely that quite many have already seen it, who might think that it's funny. So at that point sharing may not bring such joy to me. So not that much... Or let's say like, some amount, but targeted. So not like publicly to everyone, I do that very rarely.*

It is evident that there is a shared social understanding, which leads the respondents to limit the amount of the content they post publicly. Additionally, none of the respondents actively commented publicly shared content despite their interest towards reading comments made by other users. Thus, my study finds a strong preference for the use of targeted sharing and interaction in the online setting. This is because of the socially shared understanding of a high level of demands that go with public sharing. As can be seen from the respondents' stories, publicly shared content has to pass much stricter assessment criteria than targeted sharing. Mette notes that there is very little content that would be relevant to all audience members in any particular public channel. Thus, if the content is specific to an individual or a group, it should not be shared publicly. Moreover, having a shared understanding of what type of content is regarded as, for example funny, is much easier to accomplish with specific individuals or groups rather than in relation to a large audience. Finally, it takes more time and effort to formulate the message when it is going to be public. Following these socially shared understandings, it seems that public sharing is a high-threshold activity to which targeted sharing is a hassle-free alternative.



Interestingly, Eetu expresses concern for the timeliness of the shared content in his story. The viral nature of online videos and the timeliness factor has also been noted by previous research. Tucker (2014) suggests that in terms of online video advertisements, there is an inverse U-shape correlation between online video advertisement reach and persuasiveness, which begins at three to four million total views. In other words, when online videos gain a certain level of reach, their persuasiveness suffers. Like Eetu, also other participants displayed awareness of the timeliness factor when sharing and receiving online videos to the extent that this was an explicit rule guiding the practice of social sharing.

## **6.4 Controlling**

This section discusses different ways of managing the consumption of online videos under the thematic term of controlling. Controlling relates to the distinctively dynamic nature of online videos, which allows agents to influence their consumption experience. Moreover, this process is highly integrated in all of the practices discussed above. In other words, controlling was evident in loitering, learning and social interaction and thus, refers to the use of online videos in general. Previous research has recognized the consumers' increased ability to control the consumption experience as distinctively characteristic of online videos (Southgate et al., 2010; Lee & Lee, 2012; Huang et al., 2013). It was evident in my interview data that all of the respondents engaged in activities that allowed them to better control their consumption experience and these processes will be discussed in the following.

It is common these days that paid online video advertisements are placed in the beginning (pre-roll), in the middle (mid-roll) or after (post-roll) the online video. The user can most of the times choose to skip the advertisement after a certain time but sometimes viewing the advertisements is not optional. All of the respondents engaged in processes that allowed them to avoid watching these advertisements. Iines describes the common approach taken by the respondents:

*Iines: When it is possible to skip [the advertisements], I skip them immediately. They do irritate me... A great deal, too. Yeah, I don't watch them. And if I think about, now that I'm working, like today I was at work... So there I usually do so that if I see that an advertisement comes*

*up in the beginning of the video, and some may even display for how long they will last, so then I notice that sometimes I turn it to mute. And then I start, for example if I have to bag dog food or something, so then I start doing that. And then after a while I check that okay, the advertisement will end soon. And only then will I start watching the video. So I do try to avoid those advertisements quite a lot.*

This process of avoiding watching advertisements was common among the respondents. Like Ines, many said they would skip the advertisements as soon as it was possible and, if skipping was not possible, they would occupy their time with something else. As seen in her story, Ines prefers to engage in an activity outside the device used for watching online videos to avoid being exposed to commercial messages. Some of the other respondents said they would open a new window and focus on something else while the advertisement was playing on the background. The most extreme actions taken to avoid watching paid advertisements included banning advertisements completely with an add-in designed for this specific purpose and refraining from watching videos on certain channels, where skipping advertisements was not possible.

Interestingly, the option to skip advertisements is very specific to online videos and is not an option for example on traditional media such as television and radio. Many of the respondents said they do not mind seeing advertisements elsewhere but in online videos they felt the advertisements just stood in their way. Both avoiding exposure to commercial messages and quickly accessing desired content were identified as key teleoaffective structures under controlling practices. Many of the respondents said that the advertisements in online videos were intrusive and out of place and, ultimately, prevented the agent to reach what they really wanted to see. This strongly suggests that there exists a socially shared understanding, which suggests that online videos are, or should be, quick, free and easy to access and therefore not overpopulated by commercial messages. As indicated by the respondents, enforcing too many advertisements on consumers may result in consumers discontinuing to watch the online video because the cost (watching a commercial message) of accessing the video is considered to be too high. Additionally, overpopulating videos with too many compulsory advertisements may lead to consumers completely avoiding channels that

do not provide the option to skip advertisements. These notions are important to both channel managers and marketers.

In addition to skipping and avoiding advertisements, all of the respondents engaged in actions that allowed them to control the actual progress of a single online video. Again, the teleoaffective structure relating to controlling the progress was being able to quickly access the content the agent wished to see. This is made possible due to the control elements, such as pause and stop, which refer to the explicit rules of how the agents are allowed to control the video's progression. Julia and Eetu discuss their ways of controlling the viewing process:

*Julia: Well usually I first watch it [a video] through completely. Unless it's really long, then I might screen it further a little bit so that I jump from one point to another. Because usually I don't feel like watching it completely through if it lasts longer than ten minutes. So then I just choose the best bits. In YouTube, you get a shortcut view when you move your mouse there [in the timeline]. So then you can approximately see what it contains. So then I may just scroll to the best part. But usually I watch it through once and then I may watch it once again, if it is a good video. And then I may just watch the best part over and over again. Because I have cheap thrills. [laughs]*

*Eetu: It goes on so that first I watch it on the small screen for a while and then I start looking into how long it lasts and then if it's darn long, then it may be that I click it onwards a little bit so that [something] starts happening. And if I get interested, only then will I really start focusing on the video. So then I might set it to full screen and really start watching it. But pretty often it may be that I watch the first fifteen seconds and conclude that this is useless and I turn it off. If there's like nothing happening. It must be really interesting in the start so that I bother to watch it because the supply is really abundant, especially in terms of boring and bad videos.*

As can be seen from the stories by Julia and Eetu, they often meddle in the progression of a video by scrolling through, jumping from one point to another, repeating certain scenes and importantly, if the video has failed to capture their interest, by quickly disengaging from the video. Both Julia and Eetu said that, if the online video was long, they would jump forward to see what the video was about. Thus, it would seem that consumers tend to watch online videos in a different manner than what was initially designed by the content producer.

As Julia describes, especially in the case of longer videos, she usually picks the best bits to watch. In other words, agents are actively choosing, which parts are worth their time. This strongly suggests that the respondents are critical about the content they consume, however trivial it may seem. Moreover, the respondents described that the decision to watch or exit the video was often made quickly. Online videos therefore have to capture the viewer's interest quickly within few seconds since the beginning of the video. As Eetu suggests, this approach may relate to the socially shared understanding of an almost unlimited supply of interesting online videos to choose from. There is always the possibility that the next video is either funnier, more informative or of better quality than the one you are watching. These notions about how the actual watching process of an online video advances are of interest to anyone who wishes to produce engaging online videos.

The shared understanding among the respondents seems to be that online videos are somewhat disposable. To suggest that they are disposable refers to the notion that online videos are characterized as quick, easy and free to access, short in duration and preferably to the point and importantly, easy to discard. Most of the respondents said that a good video lasted for only a few minutes, which suggest that the time frame for online videos is a very short one. If the video was over ten minutes, the respondents would skip parts of it and only watch scenes that were of interest to them. Moreover, the respondents emphasized that the video had to capture their interest within moments or they would simply exit it. Thus, online videos that went straight to the point were highly preferred by the respondents.

## 6.5 Summary

My study identified four themes of practices, including loitering, learning, social interaction and controlling, which describe different ways of using online videos. These themes were evident across the interview data with some of the respondents actively engaging in all of them while others were active in only some. Notably, the identified practices are overlapping and intertwined between the four themes. However, my interview data clearly suggested that certain practices existed more often together than separately, which led to the categorization used in this study.

This study identified that online videos are a key element in the agents' unwinding and killing time practices, which were discussed under the theme of loitering. Notably, the processes of unwinding and killing time are both regarded as non-exhausting and low-involvement activities, that often include the consumption of somewhat trivial online video content and where the agent is passive in relation to discovering new videos. The teleoaffective structures identified in regards to unwinding suggest the practice is carried out to have a break or to disengage from exhausting activities such as work and studies. In turn, killing time is a practice that is carried out when the agents have nothing else to do. Thus, it entails the teleoaffective structure of combatting boredom. Killing time differs from unwinding in the sense that it consist of consuming time for the simple reason that every agent has to spend their time doing something. Both of these activities help to balance the agent's day as they offer a counterpart for demanding high-involvement practices. As discussed in the findings, loitering challenges the explicit rules of working. Notably, all of the respondents regarded loitering as requiring virtually no thinking at all. The agents had a strong socially shared understanding of loitering being a trivial and low-involvement activity and online videos as pure entertainment. Moreover, loitering was strongly associated with an understanding of videos being picked and delivered for the agent.

In addition to consuming online videos as loitering, many of the respondents consumed online videos as learning. The socially shared understanding in learning is that it is a high-involvement activity, where online videos are perceived as a source of information. Main processes with informational purposes included learning about

products or current problems. These activities often required only short-term involvement. The teleoaffective structures associated with these doings include supporting complex purchase decisions and resolving a current problem. Additionally, the respondents engaged in long-term processes of learning about their hobbies and areas of interest. Staying up-to-date and gaining deeper knowledge were identified as key teleoaffective structures guiding long-term learning practices. As opposed to passive discovery, which occurs with loitering, learning coexisted with active discovery of online videos by the agent. Thus, the socially shared understanding was that the content is picked and delivered by the agents themselves. Moreover, the agents shared a social understanding suggesting that source credibility and expertise could be evaluated based on peer reviews and viewcount on the short-term as well as activity level and relationships with content creators on the long-term.

My study also suggests that online videos are widely consumed in social interaction. In contrast to viewing videos as entertainment or information, there is a social understanding that online videos are, first and foremost, parts of social interaction. As discussed, agents use online videos in social interaction both online and offline. Interestingly, most of the social interaction online is targeted rather than public to all. This is because of the socially shared understandings that dictate public sharing. Moreover, the agents have socially shared understandings about what is regarded as relevant and interesting content by them and others. Agents also consume online videos simultaneously with others and online videos are often part of discussions both online and offline. Building and maintaining relationships and expressing love were identified as key teleoaffective structures in social interaction. Agents also expressed social understandings of altruism and concern for others as well as shared joy, which were essential elements of social interaction. Notably, there seems to be an explicit rule that dictates the timeliness of online videos, which refers to the tradeoff between reach and persuasiveness.

Lastly, all of the respondents engaged in activities that allowed them to control their consumption experience. This is made possible by the video control panel and the opportunity to skip advertisements, which describe the explicit rules of controlling online video progress. The main processes of controlling carried out consisted of advertising avoidance and controlling the progression of online videos. To quickly

access the desired content and to avoid exposure to commercial messages were identified as key teleoaffective structures under controlling. Moreover, there is a socially shared understanding that online videos are, or at least should be, quick, easy and free to access. Finally, agents share an understanding of an almost unlimited supply of interesting online videos available, which crucially influences their use of online videos.

The following table summarizes key findings into a table of online video consumption practices, which presents my results in a concise manner. The table demonstrates the various aspects, which are essential in practices and have been part of the data interpretation process. It breaks down the themes of practices into sayings and doings, which illustrate typical stories provided by participants and the doings that have been drawn based on the sayings. Additionally, it identifies socially shared understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures that link sayings and doings.

	<b>LOITERING</b>	<b>LEARNING</b>	<b>SOCIAL INTERACTION</b>	<b>CONTROLLING</b>
<b>Sayings</b>	<p><i>“It’s like ‘check your brains at the door’ type of activity”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s sort of just like, killing time”</i></p> <p><i>“At the same time when you are unwinding at the couch”</i></p> <p><i>“You become sort of a Roman emperor being like ‘entertain me’”</i></p>	<p><i>“If I’m thinking about buying something I go to YouTube and do a search with that product name and I watch those videos, how people have reviewed them”</i></p> <p><i>“And then technology is just that I like to stay up-to-date about what is going on because it interests me and is somewhat close to my work”</i></p>	<p><i>“There we sit side by side on the couch and watch them from about seven to eight in the evening”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s more about enjoying something together”</i></p> <p><i>“This person has had a bad day, they might cheer up from this”</i></p> <p><i>“In a closed environment I don’t have to think about what I’m going to say about this that much”</i></p>	<p><i>“When it is possible to skip [the advertisements], I skip them immediately. They do irritate me”</i></p> <p><i>“Usually I don’t feel like watching it completely through if it lasts longer than ten minutes”</i></p> <p><i>“It must be really interesting in the start so that I bother to watch it”</i></p>
<b>Doings</b>	<p>Unwinding from previous activity (such as work or studies)</p> <p>Killing time</p> <p>Passive discovery of new online videos</p>	<p>Learning about products or current problems</p> <p>Learning about hobbies and interest</p> <p>Active discovery of new online videos</p>	<p>Consuming online videos with others</p> <p>Targeted social sharing of online videos</p> <p>Discussing</p>	<p>Avoiding paid advertising</p> <p>Controlling the progress of online videos</p>
<b>Understandings</b>	<p>Online videos as pure entertainment</p> <p>Trivial and low involvement activity</p> <p>Content is picked and delivered for the agent</p>	<p>Online videos as source of information</p> <p>Perceived source credibility and expertise</p> <p>High involvement activity</p> <p>Content is picked and delivered by the agent</p>	<p>Online videos as parts of social interaction</p> <p>Shared joy</p> <p>Altruism and concern for others</p> <p>Targeted sharing vs. public sharing</p> <p>Perceptions of relevance and interesting content</p>	<p>Online videos as disposable</p> <p>Online videos are/should be quick, easy and free to access</p> <p>Unlimited supply of interesting online videos</p>
<b>Explicit rules</b>	<p>Rules of work and study vs. loitering</p>	<p>Product information and instructions</p>	<p>Timeliness of online content</p>	<p>Video control panel and advertisement skip button</p>
<b>Teleoaffective structures</b>	<p>To have a break or to disentangle after demanding activities</p> <p>To combat boredom</p>	<p>To gain support for complex purchase decisions or to solve a problem</p> <p>To stay up-to-date or gain deeper knowledge</p>	<p>To build and maintain social relationships</p> <p>To express love</p>	<p>To quickly access the desired content</p> <p>To avoid exposure to commercial messages</p>

**Table 1: Online video consumption practices**



## 7. Discussion

In this section I will further discuss the key findings of my study in relation to previous research. The current study aimed at understanding how online videos are embedded in the daily lives of Finnish viral video mavens through the identification of key practices. This study identified four themes under which online video consumption practices were discussed: loitering, learning, social interaction and controlling. Although previous research has not approached online videos from the specific viewpoint of practices, many of the findings of this study are in line with previous research. This section will discuss my study findings and how they relate to previous research conducted within the fields of viral concepts.

My study identified loitering as one of the thematic groups, under which two specific practices of unwinding and killing time were discussed. According to previous research conducted by Lee and Lee (2012), watching online video advertisements is motivated by the escapism-pass time factor. This suggests consumers believe that watching online video advertising offers them a break from daily routines and helps them to occupy their time (Lee & Lee, 2012). Although the focus in Lee and Lee's (2012) study was specifically on online video advertisements, these findings are in line with my study of online videos as a whole. It was evident in my study that agents would use online videos to disengage from their daily routines of especially work and studies, which were the dominant demanding activities in the interviewees' lives. Additionally, respondents engaged in online video consumption to have a break within the same activity and when transferring between different exhausting activities. This can be seen to be in line with Lee and Lee's (2012) finding that online videos provide a break from daily routines. In regards to killing time, my interviewees described that they often used online videos to simply occupy their time, which, again, is clearly in line with Lee and Lee's (2012) findings.

Interestingly, my finding suggesting that loitering often coexists with passive discovery of new videos contrasts the findings by Lee and Lee (2012). Lee and Lee (2012) suggest that consumers that are highly motivated by escapism-pass time factor are more likely to actively search websites for online video content and less likely to come across online video advertisements by chance. In the scope of my study, the

respondents engaging in loitering demonstrated a clear preference towards having online videos cherry picked and presented for them by others. Hennig and Phillips (2012) provide support for my findings. As they suggest, viral video mavens do not sort out vast amounts of unsolicited videos to find the best ones to forward to their audience (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). Similarly viral video mavens in my study indicated a strong preference towards receiving videos from channels, sites or their social networks as opposed to diving into the vast clutter of online videos and picking out the good ones to forward to others.

In sum, my study provides support for previous research by Hennig and Phillips (2012), but contrasts Lee and Lee (2012), in suggesting that consuming online videos while unwinding or killing time coexists with passive discovery. Notably, many of the respondents said that the only time when they would actively look for new videos was when they needed to solve a current problem or learn more about a specific issue. Contrasting the findings by Lee and Lee (2012), my study associates active discovery specifically with learning. Thus, my study suggests that passive discovery of online videos takes place within the practices of loitering while active discovery usually coexists within the practices of learning.

In support of my identification of practices revolving around loitering and learning, Cha and Chan-Olmsted (2012) found that timely learning and relaxing entertainment were the most salient motives for watching online videos. Also Lee and Lee (2012) found these two factors to motivate online video views. However, my practice theoretical approach allows investigating these two themes more in-depth than previous research has done. Interestingly, the content consumed during learning practices seems to revolve around information about products and their use. This should make learning practices especially interesting to marketers. In contrast, the practices of unwinding and killing time principally coexisted with the consumption of funny and entertaining videos, especially the ones including animals. According to the respondents most of the funny videos were user generated and marketer-produced content was not regularly consumed when unwinding or killing time.

Also previous researchers have noted the general preference towards humorous online videos (Hennig & Phillips, 2012; Hsieh et al., 2012; Guadagno et al., 2013).

However, my study suggests that humor is the main preference criteria only when agents are consuming online videos within the practices of loitering. In contrast, within the practices of learning, consumers put more emphasis on the informational value of the video. Moreover, the respondents said that they evaluated the video's source carefully and critically when they were consuming it for learning. This type of careful selection was not evident in regards to the videos consumed during loitering. Previous research lacks the ability to provide a multi-faceted understanding of different ways of using online videos and what types of contents are consumed during these differing practices. It seems evident that the potential for marketers to influence consumer decisions is much better within the practices of learning rather than loitering as learning practices are closely linked to making purchase decisions.

In addition to identifying practices under the themes of loitering and learning, my study identified several practices under the theme of social interaction. Previous research has suggested that the possibility for building and enhancing social relationships is one of the key motivators for consumers to watch online videos (Lee & Lee, 2012). My study supports this finding and introduces online video consumption practices that are carried out to build and maintain social relationships. As my study suggests, online videos are consumed and discussed in the presence of others as well as shared through online platforms. Although the existence of a social etiquette in sharing online videos has been identified by previous research (Phelps et al., 2004), none of the previous studies have specifically described the social situations, where online videos are consumed collectively.

My study supports the findings by researchers such as Chiu et al. (2007), Ho and Dempsey (2010) and Phelps et al. (2004), who argue that altruistic motivations influence consumers' forwarding intentions. In contrast, Lee et al. (2013) found in their study that consumers express no behavioral belief that passing along online videos would allow consumers to express love and concern for others. However, my study participants expressed that they enjoyed being able cheer up their close ones by sharing online videos to them, which strongly indicates a concern for others and provides support for altruistic motivations guiding the use of online videos. Moreover, my study respondents reported they would only forward content that was either important or likely to be received favourably by others, which is in line with the

findings by Phelps et al. (2004).

Interestingly, the respondents in my study indicated awareness of the timeliness factor that is characteristic of online videos. Hennig and Phillips (2012) found that timeliness, which refers to how long the video has been available online, is a crucial factor when consumers consider whether to pass along online videos. Active sharers of online content reported they prefer sharing videos that they assume others have not seen yet as they do not see any added value in sharing a video that has already been seen by most of their peers (Hennig & Phillips, 2012). Tucker (2014) identified a tradeoff between online video ad reach and ad persuasiveness as her findings suggest the existence of an inverse-U shape correlation. According to Tucker (2014), this negative relationship begins at three to four million total views, where onwards the persuasiveness keeps on decreasing. Similarly my study participants demonstrated strong awareness of the tradeoff between reach and persuasiveness of online videos, which crucially guided their social sharing of online videos.

To the best of my knowledge, no previous study has noted the vast difference between targeted and public sharing. Yet, all of my study participants favored targeted sharing, which was regarded as a low-threshold activity. More importantly, targeted sharing allows the sender to determine the message audience so that the content will be relevant to that specific individual or group. Previous studies have approached sharing as a uniform activity but my study suggests that public and targeted sharing have prominent differences. The respondents indicated that they had specific individuals or groups in mind to which they were accustomed to sharing online videos in a targeted manner. More importantly, all of the respondents said they felt pressure to watch online videos they received and often it made them feel special that someone had thought about them. Overall, my results suggest that targeted sharing is a widespread activity that is easier to engage in than public sharing, almost guarantees that the content will be viewed and is possibly perceived more favorably due to the tailoring of the message to the receiver's tastes.

In regards to the practices relating to the theme of controlling, this study identified controlling online video advertising exposure and controlling online video viewing progress as dominant practices. The possibilities to skip advertisements and to control

viewing progress are very specific to online videos. This has also been noted by previous researchers, who argue that online videos are characterized by viewer pull, as opposed to marketer push (Huang et al., 2013). Moreover, online videos offer more possibilities for consumer control, which has been argued to empower and activate the consumer (Lee & Lee, 2012). Lee and Lee (2012) argue that online video advertising combines the power of traditional television advertising and the direct response ability provided by the Internet. However, the traditional television does not allow consumers to skip advertisements, which makes online video advertising very different from traditional television advertising. Unlike with traditional advertisements, online videos provide the consumer with the possibility to pause, replay, comment, rate and share the content to others. Thus, supporting previous findings, my study argues that online videos provide consumers with controlling opportunities, which the consumers actively use and benefit from.

Also the abundant supply and the constant availability of online videos allow consumers not only to choose the content they wish to consume but also how, when and where. Some researchers have even called for the use of online video advertising to overcome advertising avoidance (Chen & Lee, 2014). However, my study suggests that online video advertising has not been able to completely overcome this hurdle as enforced online video advertising is commonly avoided. Yet, this does not suggest that marketers have no place in online videos. Many of the respondents recalled times when they had watched promotional videos on a voluntary basis because they had come across them somewhere online or they were looking for specific product information. It was only when the promotional messages were enforced on consumers in the midst of watching selected videos that the consumers actively engaged in advertising avoidance.

## **8. Conclusions, implications and limitations**

My study contributes to the literature of online video advertising by describing how online videos are embedded in the lives of Finnish viral video mavens. This approach differs from the previous research, which has mainly focused on measuring quantifiable correlations between, for example, message characteristics and forwarding intentions. In contrast, the focus in my study is to explain how the use of online videos takes place in the everyday lives of viral video mavens. My study extends previous research by looking at the routine nature of online video consumption through the theoretical lens provided by practice theory.

The main contribution of my study is to identify and describe key practices of using online videos. To begin with, my study established online video consumption as a routinized behavior. My key findings consist of the identification and description of four thematic groups of practices: loitering, learning, social interaction and controlling. These themes describe the daily activities that viral video mavens tend to engage in and provide in-depth information for marketers about the ways online videos are actually utilized by consumers. Moreover, my study discussed the socially shared understandings, explicit rules and teleoaffective structures that link sayings and doings. Although previous studies have addressed the attitudes of viral video mavens, they have not adequately described real situations, where online videos are used. Thus, my study fills an evident gap in previous research.

The obvious limitation to my study is that it focuses specifically on viral video mavens, which means that the findings are in no way representative of all online video users. As the criteria for selecting interviewees demanded that the interviewees demonstrate a routinized manner of usage, many initial interview candidates failed to fulfill this requirement at the initial stage of probing. However, to overcome the small sample size, I strived to gather more in-depth information from the study participants. It is possible that viral video mavens possess practices, which are not evident in the larger population. Thus, to study online video usage in the larger population would be an interesting avenue for future studies.

My findings should provide useful insights for any marketer that is interested in promoting products and services through the use of online videos. With an understanding of how videos are used, marketers should be able to design online videos to match with specific practices. For example, the content and how it is consumed differ significantly between loitering and learning. Especially the role of online videos in providing support for purchase decisions could be an interesting avenue for future studies as it directly influences consumers' decision making. Moreover, the identification of passive and active discovery informs marketers about the way consumers discover new online videos. Online video content that is consumed in loitering has to be cherry picked and presented to consumers, whereas in learning, consumers are more willing to do the digging up on their own. This naturally influences the channel choices and promotional activities required.

In regards to social interaction, it is evident that videos are used socially in more ways than can be captured by social media metrics. Marketers should strive to encourage all possible ways of social interaction as this potentially widens the audience the content reaches. Interestingly, my study participants all favored targeted sharing over public sharing. Previous researchers have failed to make this important notion. Based on my results, marketers should encourage consumers to engage in targeted sharing because it is a low-threshold activity and the receivers of online videos often feel a pressure to watch the content. Moreover, targeted sharing ensures the relevance of the content to the receiver. Finally, controlling is a widely exercised activity, which allows consumers to tailor their online video consumption experience. At minimum, marketers should be aware of the controlling opportunities provided by online videos as this sets high expectations for the first few seconds of the video to capture the viewer's interest.

To conclude, my study argues that consuming online videos is a highly routinized activity. Although my study focused on the hard-core users of online videos, the growth that online videos are experiencing suggests that the number of viral video mavens is destined to grow in the future. Thus, marketers should know how the distributional force of viral marketing actually uses online videos. This study made an attempt at filling that gap by identifying loitering, learning, social interaction and controlling as key thematic groups of online video consumption practices.

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