Theorising ambiguity: telling deliberately equivocal viral stories

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Theorizing Ambiguity - Telling Deliberately Equivocal Viral Stories

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1. Viral reality marketing

> *How do you tell a story of a marketing campaign that is not (yet) a marketing campaign when encountered?*
>
> *A campaign driven by curiosity spurred on by uncertainty and ambiguity, and everchanging as it grows. Where each participant and beholder encounters a different set of subparts and facets and does so in a different order than everyone else.*
>
> *A campaign that is brief but intense. Appearing out of nowhere, without warning nor time to prepare. Omnipresent yet fleeting, gone as quickly as it appeared. And where the digitally mediated communications immediately wither away. Distorting or erasing the components and leaving the campaign hazy and difficult to pinpoint retrospectively.*
>
> *This is *a* story of that.*

This dissertation explores an advertising strategy where the work of spreading specific messages and brand awareness is carried out by those who are the targets of the campaign. They participate on a completely voluntary basis, which means that every time a message is shared, or awareness created, it is an active choice. Awareness is created through well-established relations and very often very personal ones too. Such personal stamps of approval of brands and messages are exceedingly difficult to buy with money. Yet in viral marketing, it often seems to be available to advertisers at low cost. Success story upon success story confirms that it is possible to reach millions of consumers in no time, partly because of personal relations and willingness to share, and partly due to the fast pace with which information can travel through digitally mediated settings.

However, despite the economically cheap solution, there are risks that need considering. The initial sender is not in control of the message, and there is a price to pay if that message is changed, either deliberately or through misunderstandings. Let us start with a few empirical examples.

Viral. Viral is something infectious, which spreads exponentially and survives due to its access to hosts. When it comes to information spreading through social media, a few examples are: news of missing persons, where crowds of volunteers share pictures and information about the person[i], a home video of a three-year-old girl providing an exhaustive summary of Star Wars Episode IV to her parents in the kitchen[ii] or copycats in the wake of that video[iii], a piece of music that can become the most watched video in the *history* of YouTube in less than 6 months[iv] and result in millions of remakes[v].

The viral content does not have to be controversial. A one-minute-long video clip of a frog sitting on a bench doing absolutely nothing became subject to millions of shares in less than a month[vi] .

These examples show that we must not simply focus on the original content being spread. To understand what we are dealing with, we need theoretical tools that capture and shed light on references to, and alterations of, that content. To stay in the metaphor of the virus, the content mutates as it spreads. The video of the girl in the kitchen encounters new hosts, who find it sufficiently intriguing to make another version of the summary as a "reply". The frog on the bench might be the most boring 43 seconds you have ever spent, and one must wonder why it has been watched millions of times. However, it has mutated, as various people have edited the video, adding soundtracks or alternative titles to the video, or even making completely new videos involving benches but no frog, yet referencing the original and connected to it through tags such as #sittingonabench. This instantly raises the question: how is a video of a frog able to get so much attention? How does it become viral? And, given that there are videos where the frog is not even featured, but only represented through the title of the video referring to it, what is the shape and what are the boundaries of the story of the frog? Where does the viral content begin and end? Initially, we could have stated that these examples consist of various innovative contributions of various independent hosts who have engaged and enhanced exposure. Furthermore alterations and mutation are central features in most of the examples.

Marketing is a strategic way of spreading information to create awareness of a specific product, brand or message or altering people's perception of this. A basic example is planting a sign where it is likely to get high exposure. A real estate developer might benefit from advertising along the highway to promote houses closer to the city. Announcing that this saves time spent in traffic jams on the highway presents the product to potential buyers. Companies can buy access to places where the target demographic is exposed.

Placement in time can be equally important to the physical placement. In the weeks surrounding Christmas, people spend more money and may be more likely to consider quick loans to make ends meet. Thus, marketing concerns itself with ensuring exposure at the right place to the right people at the right time. Achieving this can involve using an already established network such as the drivers stuck in traffic or people during Christmas season. *Time*, *place*, and already established, *temporary networks* of potential targets are the keywords worth remembering here.

Viral marketing combines the phenomenon of the viral spreading with the strategic attempts to create exposure of specific messages for a target audience. It attempts to have people voluntarily engage and thus create awareness, with the same amount of enthusiasm as when something takes off on its own.

In this type of marketing, it is not directly the brand or product that circulates, but rather the story of it. Consider the following example of how an audience can be mobilized to share, and how place and exposure can get new dimensions when something becomes viral. A Danish comedian, Anders Lund Madsen, had a sign made in Danish, announcing a Danish TV broadcast. However, he had it set up in India along a roadside[vii]. Along with the sign he announced, in a Danish press release, that the reason for placing his sign in India, was because so many people live there and therefore the exposure is much higher than in Denmark. (Lund Madsen 2010). This is of course not the real argument! It is a comedian's attempt to reach people through humor and absurdity. But it is also a strategy that relies on others to ensure that the story of the sign, along with the actual message, gets shared among Danes and thus reaches the target audience.

The outcome of this stunt was that people started talking about the sign and sharing photographs of it on various social media like Twitter, Facebook, Flicker and Tumblr. Thus, the story of the sign in India spread. This is clearly marketing, as the goal was to announce a new Danish TV show. However, the initial sender was not in control of the dissemination, which explicitly relied on others to engage and share the story. It was the story and picture of the sign, which was the advertisement, not the sign itself, and this could be shifted onto other media where it received exposure. It could become viral as it was easily converted to a variety of platforms and people found it worth sharing. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, there are many creative variations of this kind of engagement by audiences.

Viral reality marketing. The dissertation further zooms in on a specific type of viral marketing**.** In this type, initial stories are made to look real, even though they are staged and are part of a specific campaign. This attempt to boost spreading of awareness serves the purpose of adding a layer of mystique and ambiguity. By insinuation that a story *might* not be true, many get curious and start activating their social network to learn what they think and to make up their own mind. They start developing and sharing their own theories by making new connections between bits of information and by filling in gaps. This often results in an exceedingly high exposure. In almost all cases, the product or message in question is not clear from the beginning. It is revealed after enough exposure

has been gained. This strategy intrigues more people to engage. However, it also adds a challenge for the companies using it. Even though their stories get high exposure, there is work to be done in ensuring links between the stories that developed *before* it was revealed to be a campaign, and the specific product that is intended to gain awareness from the exposure *as* it is revealed. Furthermore, there is a challenge in making sure people do not feel deceived and lose trust in the product, as they discover they were part of a campaign without knowing for sure.

The Danish Road Safety Council, in a campaign intended to create speed awareness among young men in Denmark, released a video on YouTube that informed viewers about a new Danish solution for creating such awareness. The video entitled Speedbandits, informed the viewers of a new system featuring topless women standing along the roadside while holding speed limit signs. While awareness of speed was part of the campaign from the very beginning, the story of the solution of using topless women was staged. And since the Danish Road Safety Council did not immediately reveal that they were behind the video, no one knew for sure if it was part of a campaign and nor did they know who might be behind it. Several foreign countries however, believed the story to be true. A Brazilian news channel TvGlobo even broadcast the story as such. Danes of course knew that the news was not real even before it was officially claimed as an ad, yet they engaged because they were entertained by the rest of the world believing, discussing, and contemplating it. Thus, the Danes voluntarily created exposure of a message about speed awareness, while intrigued by who might have made the video in the first place. After some weeks it was finally confirmed to be a made-up story, and the Danish Road Safety Council officially declared that they were responsible for it. Politicians, feminists, comedians, and people with a different cultural background than Danish, uttered their objections. For some, it was the way women were exposed that became pivotal for the discussion. For others, it was the mix of sex (a matter of leisure) and traffic security (a highly serious matter) that was the problem (Lofstad 2007). Thus, a viral reality marketing campaign might be subjected to great exposure and might raise awareness of speed from the very beginning, but it also facilitates many voices that mingle with the message of speed awareness simultaneously. For instance, people who were fooled into believing it to be true, or feminists who turned it into a matter of gender instead of speed. The Speedbandits facilitated a range of discussions of differences in culture as it traveled unhindered across geographical borders as well as cultural boundaries. It became a cacophony of voices and opinions. And while more voices and perspectives emerged, the campaign gained momentum and grew even further.

1.1 Fieldwork and the field

As an anthropologist, I designed my project to include fieldwork, thereby prioritizing empirically gathered data as the starting point and motivation for the theoretical and methodological discussions to come.

Doing fieldwork on viral marketing gave rise to two challenges; firstly, that of setting up boundaries for what should be studied, while seriously taking the lack of boundaries as valuable data too. Secondly, dealing with the double role of campaigns before and after they are revealed to be so.

As the campaigns held back vital information, the information regarding the brand, and the sender behind the campaigns were not the same when gathering data and when, retrospectively, analyzing that data. It shifted between unknown, potential, and confirmed outcomes. This called for an awareness of positioning in time, for me as an ethnographer in the field, as well as in the role of an analyst looking back.

1.1.1 Boundaries

The primary consequence of using empirical data gathered through fieldwork is that being in the field, and taking the paths of informants seriously would point in many contradictory directions. Like any social phenomenon, viral marketing is not ready and delimited. However, the true benefits of conducting fieldwork are exactly the new insights that emerge from such tensions. One of the main insights gained is spurred by participants not fitting into my analytical boundary-making between advertisers and those who do the work of spreading awareness. When entering the field, I encountered an interesting difference between the two groups. Whereas advertisers were talking specifically about *their* campaigns, comparing their original intentions with later measurements of exposure, those who shared it operated with the content as part of their own agendas, more than as part of any campaign. For the latter group, it almost never mattered whether there was a marketing strategy or a product behind it. This made me expand my criteria to collect data while in the field to include things that were considered viral without limiting my focus to ads. The different way the two groups defined the boundaries of what was shared allowed for an awareness of the two seemingly conflicting perspectives on ads, depending on whether I would understand the approach of the advertisers or of those who contributed by sharing. Since the first group's success relied on the latter's way of sharing, the difference became pivotal for my data gathering. It was the first sign to look for multiple *coexisting agendas*.

Campaigns, competing brands, politicians, comedians, journalists, and Youtubers[1] – all competed by modifying and removing elements to ensure their own agendas. Sometimes more agendas walked hand in hand and even acted as catalysts for each other. Sometimes they limited each other. Asking whose exposure is created when content is shared is therefore not a simple matter that can be separated into those who make campaigns and those who enable them.

The importance of references

To describe the perspective from where to study the phenomenon of things going viral, it is necessary to illustrate the complexity when it comes to empirical boundary-making. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I took specific ads that people had shared on Facebook as a starting point, while asking them why. While asking my informants, about what they were sharing, I was met with a surprising response. To most of them, whatever content was worth sharing was referred to as viral[2], and whether it was an ad or not, was not mentioned. Participant observation allowed me to take an active part in the activities of sharing and discussing content with my informants. This meant that while I was in the field, I started locating popular videos, pictures, and stories, and took an active part in passing them on, discussing them, as well as nurturing various networks through exchanges of such content. In the beginning I spent a lot of time exchanging videos and opinions with informants, mediated through Facebook, Rocket on, YouTube, Vimeo and FunnyorDie.com. To get a better idea of the platforms my informants inhabited, whenever I received something, I started asking what *else* was worth watching. Thereby I tried to establish a link between what I had just received, and other things considered equally funny, serious, artistically amazing etc. Whenever that question was asked, people started showing their personal favorites, and most of them eagerly continued saying: *"you have to see this too"*, often followed *by: "oh that reminds me of this one",* as if it was some sort of association game. I also asked for recommendations when meeting informants outside the computer mediated setting. Sometimes we were just talking and referring to classics. This of course required that we shared some of the same references, but it was also a way of determining if we thought of the same kind of content. These classics showed me that there is a practice of actively making *inclusions and exclusions* through referencing.

[1] People who make money out of creating content on their own YouTube channel.

[2] This was the response in 2008. In 2021, concepts of viral and viral marketing are no longer buzzwords that describe whatever is shared for entertainment through a digital setting. But when I began fieldwork, when I asked my informants for examples on something viral, they referred to whatever was shared on social media.

I realized that there was an already established genre of content that I should know to be able to participate. Referring to classics required experience and a familiarity with what was going on, and what people assumed that other people knew as well. I did not possess this knowledge from the beginning. I slowly learned more and more about such classics. I learned that there was a repertoire of pictures, pieces of music, and genres of storytelling that were brought into play again and again, yet always with tiny twists that made them relevant in new contexts. For instance, referring to Chuck Norris, using a Russian reversal, attaching the phrase "like a Boss" etc. These were classics many of my informants knew, and were often revisited whenever something else gained much attention. However, one could not just refer to them in any way or any context. One would have to choose the right references at the right time, with the right words or pictures for others to like it, or pass it on. I will return to the whole genre and the social skills and knowledge one would have to possess to make successful references in chapter three. For now, it is sufficient to say that starting to follow informants wherever they pointed, made visible how not everyone could make such successful references. This made it clear, that there was a field to enter; a field that for the anthropologist must be entered with humility and with a beginner's limitations, but also with curiosity and without too many preconceived assumptions.

Often, we ended up in front of a screen almost fighting to share funny stories, hilarious jokes, prank calls, artful demonstrations of skill etc. These encounters were like social magnets. They often happened at parties, where a group of people ended up gathering around a screen, using their personal favorites as party entertainment. But much more than taking shift in showing videos was going on in these exchanges. There was a constant exchange of references to things. Both in the videos that got played, but also in conversations going on about one video, as another one was shown. Most videos were cross-referencing several things at the time. For instance, by mixing a reference to the Danish Road Safety Council with Hitler Rants Parodies.[3] These references served to map out who was familiar with different genres, specific spoofs, and even who was able to catch subtle references without too much explanation. It was an exercise in reference skills and genre recognition alongside the harmless entertaining act of watching amusing videos with friends.

The video mentioned earlier with a frog sitting on a bench is one such example of both cross-referencing and the requirement of knowledge. As people started adding music, comments, and voice

[3] if the reader does not yet recognize the Hitler Rants Parodies, then the reader might consider him or herself in the same position as the anthropologist encountering it before becoming familiar with the genre. Do not worry, in two pages time you will know more about this phenomenon as well.

over, this frog, literally sitting on a bench doing nothing, somehow started to become fun to watch. It served as a facilitator for people making references and matching content by making new connections and links. A tiny example of in- and exclusions made by references was a version of this video with the title: Sitting on bench like a boss. To appreciate this, it would require knowing and recognizing the Like a boss meme[viii].

Another insight learned from exchanging videos gathered around a shared screen[4] was that surprisingly much time was spent on waiting due to technical issues, as someone needed to find a specific video or picture. Sentences like these were quite common: "*I have to log on to my Facebook account to find this one*[5]", "*I'll try Googling it using other words"*, "*You can't see this tomorrow without being my friend on Flickr, only my friends can see it.*" and, *"what? YouTube must have deleted it!"*

It became clear to me, that exchange of content was neither an activity solely to be studied sitting behind one's screen at home, since references were made orally too, nor was it one that was unaffected by the digitally mediated platforms used, as locating content was affected by deletions, different spellings, or which type of digitally mediated connection there was between my informants and me. In- and exclusions were made digitally, but also materially and socially.

"Is it an ad?"

Following informants contributed to an interesting nuance: one of my initial categorizations had to be adjusted. Asking people to point out what was viral, and how they engaged with viral marketing failed. For one thing, the marketing element was not really something they noticed or were conscious about. To them "viral" meant something entertaining. Whenever I mentioned viral marketing, they replied by pointing to something they had received or shared that they liked. Often, they did not even realize that some videos were ads whereas others were not. They almost never referred to "the ad" or the products. They referred to elements of what they shared: "*look at this guy, he jumps the bus, but it looks fake*" or "*check out this soundtrack, I wonder who made it?*" "*This is a remake of another*

[4] In 2021 it would be more normal to gather around smartphones. But this was in 2008.

[5] In 2008 it was more common to log out whenever Facebook was not in use. The button was easy to see and was featured on the front page on the user's profile. Today Facebook has changed its set up so that the log off button is hidden in a drop-down menu. Furthermore, Facebook is connected to other services the user is likely to use, for instance WhatsApp (1,3 million users in 2019), messenger (1,2 million users in 2019) Instagram (0,8 million users in 2019). This makes is feasible to stay logged in at all times so shifting between the platforms can happen without logging in and out. The platforms also ensure that connected content from one of the users' platforms can get shared on the other easily.

video, I'm sure! Let me see if I can find it for you." If, during such conversations, I reminded them of the marketing aspect, most of them did not really care. For them, the distinction between ads and other types of videos had little or no relevance.

I also made it clear to my personal network, i.e., family, friends, and colleagues that my new work was about viral marketing. This resulted in a new desire to share some of the videos I had encountered during my initial fieldwork, but it also resulted in many friends wanting to show me other things in return. However, once again the layers of references and the in- and exclusions became clear. For example, my husband shared an office with a colleague from Germany. Once he asked what I was doing and said: *"if you study viral marketing then you have to see this. It is in German, but it is hilarious".* It was a scene with Hitler and his soldiers gathered around a table. It was from a movie but the difference between the actors' lines and the words in the subtitles gave away that something had been changed. My husband's colleague laughed as we watched the video. I did not. When I asked him what the point was, he replied: *"it's just a joke!"* When I asked who made it, he replied: *"I don't know"* and when I asked again what was so funny, he said: *"come on, it was just a hilarious idea."* When I got home, I did a little research, and found several hundreds of these videos with Hitler and his men. They were all from the movie called The Downfall (org. title: Der Untergang), and always the same scene, where Hitler rages against his men as he realizes his defeat. Further investigation revealed that when things happened that carried relevance for the broader public, be it world championships, earthquakes, or presidential elections, someone had customized new subtitles on the topic as a reply[ix]. Often replies would not only reference events but also other video responses. There would be versions referencing the octopus who foresaw the outcome of the World Cup in 2010 (The Telegraph 2010) as well as the death of the octopus half a year later. In one version Hitler would discuss with his men what to do with the dead octopus. In another he would ponder whether it had foreseen its own death too. There would be versions concerning Obama being elected as president, the release of the new Star Trek movie, or Egypt's Mubarak blocking the internet. Often such events are soon forgotten, but as they circulate, they reflect or carry references to something easily recognizable, typically topics that are already on many people's lips.

Knowing what I know today, I recognize and embrace the genre. The Hitler scene, known as Hitler Rants Parodies[x], has become a classic, and I am aware of it as such. Even as I write, not a day goes by where I do not encounter the scene when spending time on some of the digital platforms I have inhabited. Yet each time the story is different. How exactly this scene from this movie became famous

is difficult to say. But many people *recognize* the genre, some, enough to pass them on, and some, enough to make their own. Their reasons for making their own specific versions vary greatly. Some have competitions with others working hard to find the best story to combine with the pictures and sound. Some become part of communities who take the whole movie and its entire universe of themes and characters as equally suitable for remakes. Others are individuals who have messages they want to spread and doing so in the form of this Hitler scene makes sure there is recognition among most viewers, while also ensuring higher ratings at places like YouTube or Google.

Today, I would have contributed to the conversation with the German colleague by showing one of my own favorites: the self-aware Hitler who is annoyed with all the people who keep making Downfall parodies. I would probably have shown him some of the Danish makeovers as well. For instance, the one where Hitler is shocked to hear that juice and cake will no longer be served in the waiting rooms of hospitals. This specific reference is aimed at a Danish politician who blamed immigrants and their big families for the fact hospitals no longer serve free juice and cake (Politiken 2010). They simply bring too many relatives, the politician claimed. This video response was made by a Dane as a small protest. The person behind this version was Danish and told me that he was just fed up with the politician who made the racist comment. Making a Hitler Rants Parody, he thought, was most effective way to communicate this. Furthermore, he thought that the connection between the politician's general views and Hitler's would be insinuated with this mix of political messages and historical connotations[6]. Thus, he was involved in the viral phenomenon of Hitler Rants Parodies. Yet, when asked, he replied that communicating through the Hitler scene was merely a matter of finding a channel through which to reach more people than he would by writing on his blog, or just sharing his opinions with the nearest friends. Amongst many others, the Hitler Rants Parodies have become a "classic" when it comes to viral videos. It is viral but not perceived as marketing. But this does not mean it cannot be used in creating, for instance, political awareness or in facilitating brand awareness.

The Hitler example serves to illustrate how not insisting on boundaries, by excluding elements that are not necessarily considered marketing, has proven useful. It provides insights into the already

[6] Later during a conflict with schoolteachers, a teacher made a Hitler Rants Parody. However, a journalist not familiar with the Hitler makeovers, used it to suggest that the teacher made comparisons between Danish politicians and the Nazi regime. It caused a stir and gave those who are not familiar with the genre a reason to be offended. (Dyrberg 2013)

established genre of parody and a set of mutually agreed upon classics, which is necessary to know, to understand the environment in which viral ads grow.

Often campaigns are so deeply integrated with each other, and reference other things, that boundary-making becomes tricky, not only between ads and non-ads, but also between campaigns for one product and another, and between ads and parodies. A brief example is Blend Tec, a company that has had great success with promoting their blenders through various filmed experiments of what can be blended. In the experiments Blend Tec has blended iPads, a BIC lighter, a Weezer album, the videogame Guitar Hero, and a Wii Wheel, just to mention a few. People watch these videos out of curiosity and for amusement, but not because they are necessarily interested in the specific brand . The brands blended in Blend Tec's videos are subjected to exposure, yet they are not cooperating and their appearance is often intended as negative commentary.

But Blend Tec also refers to some brands as a positive gesture. They made a spoof where they blended an Old Spice perfume, while changing their format of the video, which is otherwise strictly the same from experiment to experiment. In the Old Spice spoof, the character from the original Old Spice ads (not the real one, but a man hired to look like him) is wearing the lab coat that the experiment conductor usually wears, and the conductor utters catchphrases that the man in the Old Spice ads usually says. Whereas iPads and other brands blended are subjected to negative comments by the conductor, this video celebrated the brand of Old Spice. Even though it is a spoof made by Blend Tec, it can also be perceived as an ad for Old Spice.

Vat19.com is an online store, which among other things sells what they call "world's greatest gummy bear", and Vat19.com makes videos to communicate with its users. Once, they claimed that a viewer had asked them: "will it blend?" – a clear reference to Blend Tec's experiments. They then replied by making their own filmed experiment, remarkably similar to the original Blend Tech ads. It is not clear if someone asked that question, or whether they just said so (it is often used as an element to read letters from viewers, which are not actually from viewers. It is often a rhetorical tool for introducing motivation for experiments). However, the exposure of the gummy bear, as well as their brand is made recognizable due to referencing, or tapping into the already established genre of blending things that were not meant to be blended. The audience is rewarded for recognizing this reference, and they share it to illustrate to others, that they are aware of the link between the two. Sharing things that connect several classics in ways that add something new to both, is very characteristic in viral spreads.

Whereas it is not always clear whether links made between brands are done as part of an agreement between the two or as a spoof, sometimes brands officially reference each other. For instance, eD FM, a radio station in Albuquerque, New Mexico, enlisted the front person from Will It Blend? to do a Will It Blend? version promoting their radio station. The outcome was three 30-second commercials showing different styles of music CDs being blended, showcasing the station's variety format, while playing on the pun that their music blends well. They too leached on Will It Blend? – but this time Blend Tec gave their official stamp of approval by letting their front figure advertise for the station. Whether the radio station paid for the service or not is not clear, but the examples serve to illustrate how lines between one campaign and another can be blurred. Sometimes brands play with this lack of transparency as well. They can spoof other brands, so it looks as if they are cooperating, or deny associations in ambiguous ways that make people start discussing if there are connections[xi].

And Hitler? Is it possible to reference anything without mentioning him? A spoof of Hitler pondering if the blender can really blend anything is, of course, also made. Hitler is sure that a German U-boat armor cannot possibly be blended. He even wants to test it himself wearing the same glasses as the actor in Will It Blend? while testing[xii].

Several attempts to create awareness of brands happen simultaneously, as brands attach themselves to other campaigns or get referenced by other brands. Separating one brand from the other is not only difficult, it also makes invisible that activities around sharing, involves mastering the active creation of references between content, including both, other ads and non-ads.

Summing up, these empirical examples stand as a reminder that empirically separating one campaign from another, as well as making clear that boundaries between entertainment, ads, and political agendas is often difficult, as is pinpointing the original, the beginning or the end of what is referred to. These examples provide useful insights to the genres and practices in which companies hoping to go viral enter. If one wants to understand the layers of complexity and possess the skills for interacting within this genre, the focus should be on references.

The following section will give an overview of previous academic studies that have dealt with viral marketing. It serves to map out which areas have been subjected to interest in academic and theoretical approaches to viral marketing. It also illustrates how studies labeling themselves as viral marketing studies do not capture the challenges mentioned above. Following this I will pinpoint new

areas and questions emerging from the empirical examples given above to pinpoint areas that still call for elaboration.

1.2 Previous studies and contributions

To study a phenomenon that tries always to be ahead of what people expect, that uses the newest technological features, and that gets its attention from surprising its audience, will always make literature seem insufficient. Therefore, it is not a simple task of locating studies that concern viral marketing, and even more specifically viral reality marketing. The literature that I have used as inspiration, therefore, is a palette of various studies and traditions.

1.2.1

> *"The concept [of viral marketing] is quite simple: "it comes down to word-of-mouth advertising on the internet" (Raula Girboveanu and Puiu 2008)*

Two things are worth bearing in mind when looking at studies that label themselves as viral marketing studies: first, they tend to shift the term viral marketing to another term – word of mouth (WoM). Consequently, their focus tends to be on the difference between the two. Secondly, since they focus on how people's opinions affect other's attitudes towards a product after it has been branded, they do not provide insights as to how this can be used strategically as a marketing strategy; in all examples, studies are concerned with successes retrospectively, thereby taking as the starting point things that became a success, while retrospectively ascribing the success to those who initiated it.

The two-step flow model

Studies concerned with viral marketing are found primarily in communication studies. However, they tend to define it as word of mouth (WoM), electronic word of mouth (eWoM), or word of mouse. Let us therefore start paying attention to these variations of conceptualization.

Let us begin with the shift from viral marketing back to WoM. To understand the consequences of this shift, we need to look at the history of WoM studies. This involves older literature, but it is crucial if we are to understand WoM as a well-established concept in the genre of communication studies.

WoM can be defined as:

> *"Oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service" (Arndt 1967).*

Similar to this definition, WoM can be a way of diffusing advertised content using personal relations, such that it has a greater effect on user decision making, than any advertiser's controlled source of information would have had (Day 1971; Buttle 1998; Sheth 1971). It is assumed, that this form of interpersonal communication has greater reliability and flexibility, which allows WoM to more effectively influence consumer decisions (Bolfing 1989; Richins 1983; Engel, Blackwell, and Kegerreis 1969; Day 1971; Tybout, Bobby J. Calder, and Sternthal 1981). However, these studies have a great variety, when it comes to the more specific task of pinpointing what is worth studying, and how to obtain knowledge about this form of message spreading. Two things are emphasized in the following section on WoM studies: a focus on the character of the content as being either positive or negative, and a focus on the translation from viral marketing back to WoM, turning online versus offline into the differencing factor. The studies I surveyed, selected on the basis of their labeling of topics as "viral marketing," rarely cover the tensions and nuances that my empirical data brought into play. Instead, they relabeled viral marketing as word of mouth, only "digitally", "online" or "on the internet".

Word of mouth often refers to sociologist Paul Lazarfield's two-step flow of communication theory, which involves opinion leaders and the spreading of opinions via various communication channels. The model was first introduced by sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld et al. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944:151ff) and later elaborated by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (Katz and Lazarsfeld 2005:309 ff). The overall argument in the two-step flow model, is that product information does not affect consumers as well when it comes directly through the media, as when it is mediated by an opinion leader or influencer. The influencer is both actively recommending the product and has strong relations and a trustworthy position for people to perceive it as personally approved. The double role of the influencer as having a personal relation while promoting specific products, makes this channel of communication more effective than the same information coming directly from the media.

The first appearance of this two-step flow of communication, introduced in "The People's Choice", (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944), focused on the process of decision-making during a presidential election campaign. The researchers expected to find empirical support for the direct influence of media messages on voting intentions, but were surprised to discover that informal, personal contacts were mentioned far more frequently than exposure to radio or newspaper as sources of influence on voting behavior. They concluded that people appeared to be much more influenced in their political decisions, by face-to-face contact with other people, than as a direct consequence of

mass media exposure. The model suggests that information from the mass media moves in two distinct stages. First, opinion leaders who pay close attention to the mass media and its messages receive the information. Secondly, they pass on their own interpretations in addition to the actual media content. The first step from media sources to opinion leaders is, according to Katz and Lazarsfeld, mainly a transfer of information, whereas the second step, from opinion leaders to "their followers" involves interpersonal influence. Consequently, the term 'personal influence' is introduced to describe the process intervening between the media's direct message and the audience's reaction to that message. The theory refines the ability to predict the influence of media messages on audience behavior, and it offers an explanation as to why certain media campaigns may have failed to alter audience attitudes and behavior. But it is worth noticing, that it is but a few who are privileged enough to influence others. Consequently, if one wants to understand how personal influence can affect people, one will have to pinpoint such opinion leaders and pay attention to their translation of actual media content, while most individuals are considered followers and thus not relevant to pay attention to. The model is not referred to very often anymore, due to strong critique. For instance Troldahl, as well as Rogers, have emphasized that mass media information often flows directly to people. (Troldahl 2001), (Rogers 2003:303, 304). Furthermore, Rogers emphasizes that the two-step flow model can be too simplistic. Instead, he points to a much more complex process, which elaborates on various stages of the individual's decision-making. Still, it is important to mention the two-step flow model as a notion, since it often appears in studies of mass media communication, diffusion studies and studies of word of mouth. As an example, two things that had their origin in the two-step flow model have remained central in studies of word of mouth: the focus on personal influence as the intermediary process that allows messages to diffuse from producers to users, and the role of these intermediaries as influential. I will go into more detail with Roger's decision-making model in section 2.3.

Viral marketing = word of mouth online?

Newer studies that label themselves as studies of viral marketing argue that there is a distinction between viral marketing and WoM. Yet, they almost instantly sift out viral marketing from WoM without further explanation. It is characteristic for these studies to start with the assumption that viral marketing is word of mouth - *only online*. From that point, they begin focusing on the implications of online as opposed to offline, which turns viral marketing into a motivation for new implications as we move to a new environment for interactions online. Thus, the environment becomes pivotal due

to new features such as faster dissemination of messages, lack of trustworthiness, and lack of regulations.

Fattah in his article: “Viral marketing is nothing new”, has described it as:

> *“word of mouth advertising on steroids” (Fattah 2000:88–89)*

Goldenberg et al. writes:

> *“The mounting use of the internet, enabling surfers to communicate quickly with relative ease, has established the contemporary version of this phenomenon, known as “internet w-o-m” or “word of mouse”, as an important communication channel. In what is sometimes labeled as” viral marketing,” companies are currently investing efforts to trigger a word of mouse process and accelerate its distribution”* (Goldenberg et al. 2007:212)

Whereas these Fattah and Goldenberg point to speed as the determining factor, Lance Porter and Guy J. Golan focus on the specific term of viral marketing. Their goal is:

> *“to ultimately define viral marketing”* (Porter and Golan 2006:26, 29, 31).

However, their first move is to rename viral marketing to eWoM (Electronic Word of Mouth). This has led them to the conclusion that the difference between WoM and eWoM is worth exploring. In exploring the difference, they turn the discussion into a difference between online and offline interaction. From there they specify that the study focuses on differences between ads when shown on TV and online – called viral ads. This enables them to point to a unique thing about the internet since viral advertisements are not subject to regulation by the Federal Communication Commission. They then refer to the "anything goes" environment of the World Wide Web as an important factor in understanding the success of viral marketing as an online version of word of mouth. Thus, viral is portrayed as ads, only online, and ads are the “same thing”, only different depending on whether they are online or not. Viral becomes an adjective, that comes automatically from the environment. Consequently, Porter and Golan’s ultimate attempt to define viral marketing has ended up as a study on how the internet changes WoM as we know it.

Stringam & Gerdes specifies viral marketing differently by referring to the term Word of Mouse. (Stringam and Gerdes 2010). They evaluate consumer ratings and comments from an online distribution site to explore what factors drive consumer ratings of hotels. The study attempts to locate

and analyze the most frequently used words, as well as patterns of word usage characteristic for high and low guest ratings, respectively.

Similarly Xia & Bechwati try to understand the mechanisms underlying the differential impacts of online consumer reviews (Xia and Bechwati 2008). Through two experiments, they show that the level of cognitive personalization developed while reading an online review influences consumers' purchase intention. The consequence of insisting on using the framework of WoM, only online, is that it is the online aspect alone which is brought into focus. In this new setting, personal relations, according to Xia & Bechwati, cease to exist, and therefore, we will have to find new ways of interpreting information, since the trustworthiness that followed from personal relations in WoM is now gone. This leads to new questions such as: *"how do consumers determine whether to trust online reviewers and their reviews?"*(Xia and Bechwati 2008:3). Like Stringam & Gerdes, they refer to Word of Mouse, which, they argue, differs from traditional WoM as the sources of information are individuals who have little or no prior relationship with the information seeker. The only source from which readers can draw experiences about trustworthiness is the review itself. Again, we see that viral marketing is immediately exchanged with WoM. The focus lies in translating WoM into its equivalent online. This gives rise to a lot of new challenges since people do not know each other, and new issues of trust must be dealt with.

Early research on WoM focused on the role of negative WoM, concluding that it can be even more influential than positive, due to the fact that dissatisfied customers tend to tell more people about their experience, than those who are satisfied or even delighted (Arndt 1967; Bolfing 1989; Tybout, Bobby J. Calder, and Sternthal 1981). As a counter-response to this, Buttle has shown that consumers sometimes perceive negative WoM as positive, which complicates studies that deal with the consequences of positive and negative WoM respectively (Buttle 1998). As a consequence, newer studies of WoM have stopped focusing on the meaning of positive and negative in favor of detecting methods for measuring either the difference in consumer responses or the effects it has on growth in sales of given products (Goldenberg et al. 2007; East, Hammond, and Lomax 2008; East, Hammond, and Wright 2007).

Troy Elias has done an extensive study that brings together the studies of positive and negative word of mouth, and the implications when translating WoM to a setting on the World Wide Web.

His study concerns recommendations made by anonymous individuals who have no prior relationship with the information seeker. Elias is interested in how people perceive recommendations from people they do not know, and how people's ability to identify themselves with the imagined sender affects their attitude towards the reviewed product. In an experiment, 150 black and 111 white participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire based on their experience of a specific website that recommended restaurants. The website is known by the slogan *"Unbiased reviews by real people"* (Elias 2009:27). However, the site used in the experiment was constructed to look just like a real site, and with made up "real people" recommending restaurants. None of the participants, however, were aware of this while participating. For each recommendation, four profile pictures, accompanied by four recommendations were shown. In some scenarios, all four reviewers had black profile pictures; in some they were all white, and in some, two of each appear as reviewers. The reviews were constructed to be either good, bad, or neutral. The purpose of the experiment was to determine whether participants adapt attitudes from someone with the same skin color, and whether positive and negative reviews are more likely to be adopted if the skin color is the same. The conclusions were that positive online consumer feedback led to significantly more desirable consumer attitudes than sites with no consumer feedback, or sites with overly negative consumer word of mouth. Furthermore, black people tend to respond more favorably to services that are linked to their own racial group if those services have some positive consumer evaluations, whereas with whites, the effect is larger for negative WoM. These conclusions, as well as the object of study, tell us something about individuals located in a specific context, and how this affects their attitudes towards given products. But the project's primary aim was not to understand neither viral marketing nor WoM, but more specifically to test hypothesis on the effect of positive and negative messages when it comes to racial differences.

It is, however, worth noticing, that the study differs from the previous studies mentioned in one important aspect. It contemplates how the user has a double role in both receiving and considering whether to pass on information, thereby enabling insights into how people transform opinions into their own and to something they consider spreading further. This is not a crucial point in Elias' work even though he did contemplate on how racial images were being reproduced. This double role has been dealt with in another study by Walter J Carl, who focused on what it meant, and the demands, on having this double role.

Carl considered the relation between agents and potential targets, and how honesty and reliability affect potential users' choices (Carl 2006; Carl 2008; Carl and Noland 2008). This was done by

focusing on agents who are paid by producers to recommend products to their personal network. Carl's starting point was to focus on the agent's double role as agent and friend, as well as his or her decision on whether to disclose the role as agent. One would think, Carl argues, that disclosure of one's role as an agent recommending products for a company, would be bad. However, users perceived the disclosure as a gesture of honesty, which made the role of the agent less complicated and allowed it to be an integrated part of the relationship. *"Existing relationships implies a history of conversation about brand-related and non-brand-related topics"* (Carl 2008:23). In conversations not related to the organized program, i.e., to the product the agent is paid to recommend, trust and goodwill was built up between agent and potential user. In some of his studies such agents had relationships with some of the potential users that dated back to 6 years or more. Carl's study is interesting because it focuses on how recommendations are mediated from producer to user through a double agent. His study focused on a direct line from producer to potential target, with only one intermediary, and the double role is carried out by someone paid by the producers.

Challenges arise

Studies exchange the term viral marketing for WoM. Consequently, viral becomes the catalyst for discussions on how thing change when ads spread online. Acknowledgement of the interpersonal relationships influence and focus on what it takes to be the intermediary that turns media content into relevant recommendations for potential consumers and targets. Yet the empirical data calls for a more nuanced perspective when it comes to boundary-making as well as to the role of agents.

Recalling the situations where a group of people were gathered in front of a shared screen one can ask: are these informants interacting online or offline? Boundaries between online and offline are difficult, because the exchange of content in this example happens offline and online simultaneously.

Furthermore, content visibility depends not only on the specific platform in question, but also on the given user's account on that platform, e.g., which other accounts are connected to it. This illustrates how a single platform gives rise to many, distinct channels of communication as well as highlighting the need to explicitly consider the in- and exclusions made by digital infrastructures. The concept of online captures interactions analytically, but is less sensitive to the role that different digital platforms play in distributing and delimiting access to content. Often social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram feature a large group of connections that are heterogeneous i.e. a mix of family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances from sports etc. Thus, even within one specific platform relations are very mixed.

Empirical data illustrates how we need to go beyond metaphors such as online, or interaction mediated through the screen, as many nuances are left out. Access to content often requires active participation and is affected by social as well as digital in and exclusions. Making references through links is a mediated process, where digital infrastructures constrain and enhance interaction. Marketing experts working with viral marketing are aware of this and operate with a far more nuanced understanding of the environments in which viral content travels. In viral marketing, memes, messages, brands, and product awareness have to do with exposure shared through as many platforms and channels of communications as possible, and by as many people as possible. According to Jim Maymann co-founder of the Danish company GoViral, it is content's ability to travel unhindered that ensures momentum, since advertisers are no longer in control of the travel.

> *"When we look at the arena of digital interaction as an environment, content does not necessarily have to come in one shape, form, or carrier/agent. Strategically activating a brand campaign, should allow for multiple carriers of messages, which are easily transferable to other contexts and platforms, which are not always originally intended." (Maymann 2008:43)*

> *"If your content is of high quality, you will no longer be the only one distributing it. Consumers will post, share, send, publish, and otherwise distribute the material to their friends and other networks. This calls for an understanding of the media landscape as environments rather than channels." (Maymann 2008:43)*

When it comes to understanding the way marketing experts think of viral marketing, not much is achieved by concluding that viral marketing is WoM, only, online. This argument reduces the discussion to one about how an already known and well-studied phenomenon changed due to a new channel of communication – the internet. Instead, we need to pay attention to the variety of channels, or environments, as well as the continuous translations that happen to make things accessible across them. We need to pay attention to the various local contexts where the messages can travel and how they are modified to make sense. The metaphor of environments used by Jim Maymann is quite useful in suggesting that there are indeed rules, norms, and constraints, but we need to pay attention to the specificity of exchanges. Agents are not only a few influencers; all who contribute are agents as they decide to pass on content. There are differences in who establishes positions to have more influence. But as we have seen with Speedbandits, the voices are often unpredictable, and often, the discussion takes an unpredictable direction as it is out of the control of the promoters of the specific brand or product.

Furthermore, Maymann's definition illustrates how the agents passing on content are everyone who find it interesting enough. It is not a matter of pinpointing influencer and opinion leaders. It is a more organic approach that assumes that if the content is interesting, many will become agents simultaneously. Thus, the potential target might also be the influencer.

Influencing or adding value to a product is neither reserved for a unique group of people who qualify as opinion leaders (Katz and Lazarsfeld 2005; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944) or paid agents (Carl 2006; Carl 2008; Carl and Noland 2008). Thinking in terms of two-step flow model, dividing people into those who recommend and those who change attitudes towards products due to such recommendations, misses out on a crucial element in the viral marketing strategies I encountered. For instance, that people would hopefully be both, as each person engaging, becomes an agent in the instance he or she decides to share content with others. This means that stamps of approval, as well as opinions, might change from iteration to iteration[7]. In viral reality marketing, this is most visible, as content is deliberately made to be debated, and gaps are laid out to be filled in by people making up their own theories about what is going on. The campaigns mutate and gain momentum because of their ability to be creatively adapted in the process. People opposed to a message might become agents who, both, enhance awareness and provide counter-awareness. Thus, the double role must be elaborated on, because some of the participants, in sharing ads, do not seem to be aware or care that it is an ad. Furthermore, some carry the double role of ensuring awareness of a message or product, while promoting something else; for instance, a brand attaching their product to another as a gesture, or as a critique.

In conclusion, most academic studies of viral marketing emerge from communication studies. It is a common trait that they take Lazarfield's two-step flow model as a starting point. Even though the two-step flow model had been criticized and nuanced, there are elements that have stayed and recur in these studies. The media, the influencer and the influenced are all well-defined and analytically separate items in the analysis. There is a clear order and linearity as news of a product travels from the media to influencers and, in the end, to the potential targets. In WoM, the media is neutral as it passively mediates the news of the product unbiased. However, these studies challenge this. Unfortunately, the acknowledgement of the media in playing an active role is treated with a lack of nuance in comparison with how marketing experts doing viral marketing perceive the field. The

[7] I am aware they the term iterative suggests a linear process where something gets modified or reframed. The process is far from linear. It consists of several simultaneous events that affects each other mutually. I will return to this in chapter four.

empirical data calls for more nuances regarding online as opposed to offline, of for instance, content that travels across various platforms, as well as content that is excluded from some. The intermediary role of the media needs further elaboration than just online as opposed to offline. Furthermore, in splitting into online versus offline, these studies localize differences by pointing to lack of trustworthiness, rules, and regulations.

1.2.2 Related themes and empirical motivations for looking in new directions

In chapter two I will go further into these critiques by looking at a framework for innovations and how they diffuse. But first, I will bring another set of themes and concepts into play, for we need to elaborate on the relationships between producers, users, and innovations, as well as shape-shifting moving objects. Whereas there seems to be a gap between viral marketing studies and the empirically gathered data, there are other studies that deal with related and relevant themes.

Relations between producers and consumers

There are many empirical examples of successful mobilizations of crowds. For instance, Threadless.com (Threadless.com 2012) is a homepage that enables users of the site to upload their own T-shirt designs, while voting on all incoming suggestions. Once a design has reached a given number of votes, it is put into production and sold by Threadless.com. The site has made a business, that relies on the active participation of the crowd (Brabham 2008; Piller and Walcher 2006; Piller 2010). This business model keeps growing. Starbucks has created a community of coffee lovers amongst their customers, whom they include as product developers (Starbucks.com 2012). Dell has made a computer program, "Idea-storm" in which users' ideas can be directly implemented (Dell.com 2012), and Sarah Lee, who sells cookbooks has invited the public to contribute with recipes, with the promise that if they are exciting enough, they will become part of her next book (Openinnovationsaralee.com 2012). These business models illustrate that a business case can be made successfully while including people who engage on a voluntarily basis.

In the film and music industry, fans contribute on a voluntary basis too. Fan culture has been subjected to many academic studies. The relationship between fans and those whose work they interact and interfere with (musician, artists, labels and broadcasting companies) is dealt with from primarily two perspectives. Firstly, the emphasis is on the fact that fans often challenge companies because they compete on promoting content and thus fans can be a challenge or competitors for bands, musician, labels, and broadcasting companies. The other perspective takes the opposite approach by focusing on how businesses strategically feed fans with information in order to persuade them to work towards

the same goals as themselves. (Barra 2009; Baym and Burnett 2009). The perspectives do not characterize different strands of literature, but they illustrate how the literature on fans often see fans and companies as two groups with different goals.

Paul Booth, in his book Digital Fandom (Booth 2010), encourages us to approach the relationship between groups such as fans (who do the work completely voluntarily) and businesses (who makes the money) differently. He argues that it is important to move beyond the opposition between producer and consumer (his terms) as separate independent groups of actors. This view is characteristic for several recent studies of fandom (Bruns 2008; Lessig 2009). For Booth, the interplay is emphasized. Instead of dividing into consumer and producer, he suggests a more symbiotic relation between the two. He points to a crucial lack in the tradition of consumer studies when it comes to fandom. He argues that if media companies "produce" and audiences "consume," then what fans create through rewriting or remixing is "garbage". Instead, he suggests retrospectively thinking these metaphors to see how a different economic model – the gift economy – could work to establish a new way of describing fandom in the digital age. He proposes that media text is a gift that the receiver can reciprocate through attention, feedback, fandom, or even by purchasing advertised products. This reframing of relationships is useful in understanding viral reality marketing as well. For what if all who engage do so out of reciprocal motivation? What if they do not define themselves as consumers and producers respectively, but instead as participants with individual yet shared motivations?

Relations between global and local

Whereas WoM studies discuss how personal relations simply cease to exist, and that therefore no one can be trusted online, a more useful and nuanced contribution to interaction in digitally mediated environments is to be found in another contribution from fan studies. Luca Barra elaborates on the concept of global media products. Her study pays attention to the specificity of the process of adapting global media products into a language and a narrative that makes sense to a specific nationality, for instance, by incorporating dubbing and subtitles to make content available to Italian speaking audiences (Barra 2009). Barra underlines empirically how globally shared media products undergo a series of modifications and alterations to become accessible and make sense locally. And it is not only a matter of cultural adaptation; the translation process is a negotiation between machines, computer programs, distribution sites and access to these. Another area in which such concerns have been discussed is to be found in Japanese anime, where fans have put time and energy into creating subtitles to make sure various series became accessible to non-Japanese speakers. This includes a huge effort and the incorporation of de-Japanized elements, as well an

ability to convert and explain context, character design, and narrative organization to outsiders of Japanese culture (Cintas and Sánchez 2006; Lu 2008; Mio Bryce 2010). A point worth noticing from these studies is the issue of local adaptation. Even though things can be globally shared, they still need translation, explanation, and modification to make sense locally. These studies touch upon a very concrete example in mentioning language barriers. Furthermore, humor, irony, and even rational arguments are not always the same across cultural barriers. Limor Shifman too directs attention directly to humor and the relationships between globally spread humorous texts and the translations that go into locally adapting them (Shifman 2007). In studies of memes, and mutations of popular music videos such as Gangnam Style, she examines the seemingly chaotic universes of user generated content (Shifman 2013). Small texts, such as jokes in particular vary greatly from "global hits" to "translation-resistant" jokes (Shifman, Levy, and Thelwall 2014). Thus, despite having digital content traveling worldwide, local contexts challenge conceptualizing it as one thing. Here too, translation is an important element to keep in mind, when talking about shared content. This is not only a matter of cultural interpretation; content is digitally adapted and altered by algorithms and digital infrastructures as well.

Relations between algorithms and users

Studies of computer mediated interaction pinpoint that a lack of trustworthiness can be caused directly by digital infrastructures, suggesting that they are far from neutral intermediaries. An empirical point to bring into play here, is that digital infrastructures are often created with dynamism that take users' actions as useful input, indicating what they are likely to prefer. Thus, they change due to the way they are used.

To provide an example, Amazon.com has a service that, in addition to selling books and music, provides the user with suggestions to additional purchases, based on what others who bought the same product were interested in. This is an automatic pairing of offers done as a service by Amazon. It is not neutral, and far from impossible to compromise. In an episode of "Sex and the City", a main character Carrie Bradshaw reads a book entitled "Love Letters of Great Men." After the episode, several thousand fans of Sex and the City logged on to Amazon searching for the book. Unfortunately, no such book existed. It was fictive. Instead, Amazon's search engine suggested a collection of love letters from the 1920s called "love letters of great men and women" as a possible match, leading multiple customers to click on this entry. This action fed information into Amazon's search engine, indicating a connection between Sex and the City and the book. Some bought the book, and consequently Amazon's automatic generation of offers then suggested that these two items could be

bought together with a rebate, since people often bought them together anyway. (Hansen, Hendricks, and Rendsvig 2013). This is an example of dynamism between systems and their users. Systems are programmed to feed on input of users to better sort relevant connections from less relevant ones. So here too, people act voluntarily (even though not necessarily with consent) to improve software systems, and in the end change the output of information shown to them.

The same goes for Google, which has very advanced Search Engine Optimization to make sure users get the information they are likely to find relevant. But such systems are not neutral. Furthermore, they can compromise, and even though they might be programmed to make tasks easier and more relevant to users, they also become the subject of speculations and active attempts to alterations from many sides. For every step Google takes to optimize their algorithms, a new strategy is developed by people who attempt to take advantage of it. Often, it is a continuous race between developers and groups of creative users, fighting on both sides to gain control over the system. As an attempt to (re)gain control over their search optimization algorithms, Google started deliberately downranking homepages that aggressively tried to gain traffic. (Moz.com 2013; Schwartz 2013). Consequently, some started using the same tricks they had "illegally" (according to Google) used to gain traffic over their competitors. In doing so, they created so much traffic on their competitors' sites that Google became suspicious, and started downranking these instead. (Jensen 2013). It illustrates that not only creators of systems try to affect what is highlighted and what is downplayed; users change their actions to benefit from the system as well. With systems that are deliberately programmed to learn from users' behavior, there is a dynamic worth paying attention to. This is relevant in understanding viral videos as well, since there is a similar battle in manipulating digital infrastructures and algorithms going on there. People who realize that a specific hashtag is suddenly getting a lot of attention start adding the hashtag to their (unrelated) content to become part of what everyone is talking about. Platforms such as Facebook continuously change their algorithms to provide personalized content. This also means down ranking users actively trying to use the platform for advertising.

This turns into an ethical dilemma about what and how to filter content through algorithms. Some studies have turned their attention to specific platforms, focusing on how ranking can be obtained by familiarity with the structure of the system (Batista 2007). This has caused some to point to ethical implications, since advertised content can buy its way to higher ranking while not disclosing that it is

advertising. As Karp expressed it, traditional guidelines for separating "advertising" content from "editorial" content breakdown. (Karp 2007)

This provides challenges for platforms like Facebook that earn money on advertising, yet only the advertising provided directly by them. However, at the same time, others try to take advantage of the platform with attempts of click- and likejacking. This is a form of harvesting information by making people believe that they are participating in purely entertaining initiatives, not affiliated with advertising, while, without people's consent, harvesting personal data for the purpose of targeting ads specifically back at them. Facebook tries to downrank advertising from others, but sometimes fails to recognize it as such, because it does not look like an ad-related activity.

Such examples illustrate that it is necessary to consider the role that technical infrastructures play, and how these are affected from many sides simultaneously. Locating and determining what an ad looks like, is not only a matter of people's ability to interpret it, but also a matter of how digital infrastructures categorize and try to control it. Due to algorithms taking input from users, it is not only a matter of creating algorithms. Algorithms are, in some sense, like living organisms that are subjected to changes from many sites simultaneously.

Ethics is a concept worth keeping in mind. This becomes relevant when looking at viral reality marketing. Here, we are directly dealing with stories that are made up to look like real stories, not ads. And depending on the execution, sometimes such stories come out as hilarious pranks (like the story of the Danish Road Safety Council); other times they come out as "Denmark branded on a lie" (like "Danish Mother Seeking", a case that I will return to in detail in chapter four).

Ethics and trustworthiness also come up in studies of how digital content is treated through algorithms and across digital platforms. Daren C. Brabham's studies of the ethical aspects of businesses like www.subvertandprofit.com are worth mentioning here in particular. The site provides a technology that allows clients to effectively "game" social networking and social news sites by crowdsourcing micro-tasks such as voting, "digging," "liking," and sharing content. This technology allows companies to buy their way into higher ranking. They are able to do so through channels that make recommendations look as if they come from people who have individually and honestly made the recommendations. Subvertandprofit.com has been of interest to many researchers before (Brabham 2012; Lehdonvirta and Ernkvist 2011; Zhu 2010). However, Brabham noticed that the matter of trustworthiness has rarely been discussed in relation to strategic communication before. His point is

that there is a lack of discussion about the ethical implications of using a service like subvertandprofit.com in the first place, and it is important to critically intervene in these practices to remind these professionals of their ethical duty to the public interest and to their clients. (C. Brabham 2011)

Here we need to bear in mind how actors are continuously fighting to bypass or take advantage of digital infrastructures. In addition, single actors, who are not part of a campaign can leach onto it and turn it to their own advantage, by using the same hashtags, keywords, and domain references. A few examples that I will go further into detail through analysis later are:

Click- and Likejacking: a phenomenon on Facebook, where people must like videos before watching them. As soon as they click "like", the videos are shared to all their contacts as recommendations of the video. Likewise, a click on the video's play button can be automatically converted through a script into a "like".

Likehunting: likes are harvested, sometimes through click- and likejacking, sometimes by making a page with a name of something likely to be liked. ("Peace on earth", "Coffee", "Girls"). After a while, the name of the page is changed, thus converting millions of likes for "Peace on earth" into likes of something else without asking for the consent of those who liked it.[8] All three are attempts to harvest likes are a result of a business model, where a company pays a person to direct attention to them, which he or she does by taking advantage of a breach on Facebook.

Typosquatting: the strategy of buying domains with spellings close to other domains, for instance goolge.com. As a result, unaware people end up on pages often used for porn due to their typos. As Speedbandits.dk was rolling, someone bought Speedbandit.dk to steal traffic from it.

Domain takeovers: someone buying domains, while keeping the content, pretending that it is still owned by the previous owners, thereby misleading people to think information comes from another source than it does[9]. After Speedbandits was over and the domain no longer needed, someone else bought it took advantage of those who still searched for it.

[8] This was an often-used strategy until Facebook changed its algorithms. This has been done several times; first a restriction ensured that pages with more than 200 likes could not change name. Later the button to change name was removed, and page owners had to request a name change through personally contacting Facebook. These continuous changes illustrate how Facebook tries to maintain control as well as protect its users.

[9] *http://www.speedbandits.dk/* http://www.speedbandit.dk/

Google bombing: a strategy that has been used as tactical media in performing 'hit-and-run' attacks on popular topics. Nothing goes viral as simple messages like "*try typing in *keyword* in Google, hit "I'm feeling lucky*" *and see what happens*". The more people do so, the more Google's search optimization learns that these search terms are relevant. Consequently, they are ranked high, yet only temporarily, and only as long as people keep searching for the specific phrase. A classic, that unfortunately no longer works is "French Military Victories." If typed into Google, followed by a click on the "I'm feeling lucky" button, Google would claim there were no results, and would instead suggest trying "French Military Defeats". However, this is not actually what happened. Instead, Google learned that a particular page was often visited, and therefore it assumed it was the most relevant. This page had a layout that imitated Google, and made it look as if it was Google who suggested that no entries for French Military Victories existed.[10]

In addition to using digital infrastructures and algorithms as allies, there is an additional layer of complexity concerning ethics when it comes to viral reality marketing. Encouraging people to share content and fill in gaps brings a challenge when it comes to converting it into awareness of a specific brand retrospectively. Making things look as if they are real while later admitting they were fake and part of an ad campaign does not always turn out as a success for the brand. Hoax stories and attempts to engage people under false pretense are a well-known phenomenon for those who are well acquainted with such environments and therefore recognize the signs. However, since not all inhabitants in these environments are experienced, they do not recognize the signs, and hence engage with false pretense. One example that illustrates the difference between experienced and inexperienced inhabitants is trolling – someone who posts inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community, such as a forum, chat room, or blog, with the primary intention of provoking readers into an emotional response, or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion. Experienced participants know that the most effective way to discourage a troll is to ignore it, because responding tends to encourage trolls to continue disruptive posts. Hence the often-seen warning: "please do not feed the trolls"[xiii] . However, inexperienced people might still feed the troll without ever noticing that this is what has happened, or that the troll was never sincere from the beginning. The same goes for messages that go viral again and again, because some people take their messages

[10] If searching for "French military victories" in 2010, you would be directed to the page that looked like Google and stated that no such victories have ever existed. Instead the page suggested: do you mean French military defeats? Since June 2013, this page is no longer the highest ranking. Instead, a page on humor referring to it comes on top. This illustrates how ranking changes.

seriously even though they are a hoax[xiv]. Many such hoaxes are made by people who want to see how many they can fool. And they serve to make a distinction between those who instantly recognize it as a hoax and those who time and time again fall for it. But here, these can always be defended by referring to inexperience, whereas viral reality campaigns cause inexperienced people to blame the brand if they discover they were engaging under false pretense. Thus, there is an additional layer to fake stories, when products and brands use them, due to the risk that it is easier to blame the products, and not the people who fall for them because of inexperience. In my case studies, not only companies brand products, but more specifically publicly funded organizations do. They try to reach citizens with information. This touches upon a distinction between them and companies that want to make money (and here they do have a history of using certain extent of fakeness when it comes to utilizing staged and glamorous presentations of products and their effects). However, when it comes to government financed companies, there is no history of making things look like something they are not.

Both empirically, and from other studies of digital infrastructures, we have seen the relevance of paying attention to the relation between systems and their users, not only focusing on constraints and advantages, but also paying attention to the constant dynamism between the two. A first step in this direction was already taken by taking digital infrastructure into account, and by taking the technical aspects seriously. Yet, there is a need to elaborate further on the role of these. Analytically, I will include them as actors, i.e., active participants, since they both affect and can be affected by users. Furthermore, the issue of ethics becomes relevant since we are dealing with strategic communication where brands and companies' reputations are at stake. This is particularly the case with publicly funded organizations who have a history of honest communication without hidden agendas and ulterior motives.

Relations between in- and outside games

The PhD was partly financed by Sensemaking in User-driven Innovation in Virtual Worlds, primarily with an empirical emphasis on Second Life, a virtual world in which where people interact as avatars and, at the time[11], often detached from their person in real life. This raised a lot of interesting questions and topics overlapping with viral reality marketing. For instance, what counts as real, and how are boundaries between inside and outside virtual worlds negotiated, challenged, or broken down?

[11] Today, Secondlife is a platform that facilitates a greater variety of types of interactions than in 2008.

Literature-wise, this project on virtual worlds pointed in the direction of games and how these manage to maintain a frame for defining in and outside it as well as how to differentiate and communicate differences between play and non-play.

The modern study of play can be traced back to the publication of Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's groundbreaking study *Homo Ludens* (1938). Huizinga's book describes play as a free and meaningful activity, carried out for its own sake, spatially and temporally segregated from the requirements of practical life, and bound by a self-contained system of rules that holds absolutely. He defines it as:

> *"All play moves and has its being within a play-ground […] The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e., forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act." (Huizinga 1955:10)*

Although its core topic is playing, rather than gaming, the concept of magic circles remains a standard reference in game design studies. Notably the concept was picked up and applied to digital games by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. They note that even though

> *"the magic circle is merely one of the examples in Huizinga's list of 'play-grounds,' the term is used ... [by him] as short-hand for the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game." (Zimmermann and Salen 2004a:95)*

In more detail, they describe that in a basic sense, the magic circle of a game is where the game takes place. To play a game means entering a magic circle, or creating one as a game begins. They argue that

> *"the term magic circle is appropriate because there is in fact something genuinely magical that happens when a game begins." (ibid).*

Edward Castronova in his studies of virtual worlds (Castronova 2005; Castronova 2008) uses the notion of magic circles to describe the barrier between in and outside virtual worlds.

> *"The synthetic world is an organism surrounded by a barrier […] The membrane is the magic circle within which the rules are different […]The membrane can be considered a shield of sorts; protecting the fantasy world from the outside world. The inner world needs defining and protecting because it is necessary that everyone that goes there adhere to the different set of rules." (Castronova 2005:147).*

Castronova refers to Huizinga, yet he emphasizes that contemporary virtual worlds illuminate how the magic circle is quite porous.

> *"In the case of synthetic worlds, however, this membrane is actually quite porous. Indeed, it cannot be concealed completely; people are crossing it all the time in both directions, carrying their behavioral assumptions and attitudes with them. As a result, the valuation of things in cyberspace becomes enmeshed in the valuation of things outside cyberspace" (Castronova 2005:147, 271–272).*

More directly, there appears to be a relationship between virtual worlds and the outside world. Specifically, Castronova argues that three distinct areas stand out: markets, politics, and law. Even though virtual worlds display a range of attributes that are unique to their realm, they also exhibit characteristics deriving from the outside world. Yet despite focusing on the porousness of the membrane, he emphasizes how the membrane can protect and maintain a boundary between worlds, allowing money laundering, which is illegal outside the membrane, to take place inside. With reference to the membrane – the community of fantasy aspects – he also points to the protective function of membrane that makes actions unreal, or parts of play (Castronova 2005:245)[12]. Thus, in some instances, the membrane allows some actions to be less likely to be troubled by outside forces such as laws or politics. Castronova sifts out the term magic circle from membrane, while calling it only an "almost-magic circle due to its porousness. (Castronova 2005:147). Yet, his approach helps illustrating that the membrane can be both broken down, and yet used strategically to separate things in and outside.

Another study often referred to in game studies is Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1972) who adds that a difference between in and outside games often has little to do with what happens, but instead with the meta communication about what it means. That is how signals carrying the message "this is play" are exchanged. An example is the monkeys playing in the zoo.

> *"What I encountered at the Zoo was a phenomenon well known to everybody: I saw two young monkeys playing, i.e., engaged in an interactive sequence of which the unit of actions of signals where similar to, but not the same as, combat. It was evident, even to the human observer that to the participant monkeys this was 'not combat'" (Bateson 1972:191).*

[12] Richard Bartle too elaborated on how the membrane can be used to protect the game conceit from the courts (Bartle 2004).

Bateson emphasizes that a bite might look the same and even be constituted of the exact same actions, yet by communicating that this is not a bite but instead a game in which we bite, the two are separated (Bateson 1972:191). To play is not just to follow rules and rituals of play, but also to continually communicate the idea that the play-actions are just play, not something else. This calls for consideration of what is done to continuously communicate to audiences what is at play.

Instead of online versus offline, game studies provide an alternative to looking at different types of narratives. Salen and Zimmerman illustrate a divide between narratives as linear, and a game as non-linear. Whereas the two types of narrative do not map onto online vs offline, what we need to focus on are the structures that support different types of narratives. This divide corresponds with the way Mike Montello describes the environments in which the first big viral reality marketing campaigns emerged. The movie industry was one of the first to use the strategy of communication with ambiguous stories, hints, and unconfirmed side stories to create attention prior to the movies. The Blair Witch Project is considered one of the pioneers, often described as *"The marketing, which went viral even before "viral marketing" was a buzz word"* (Hutchinson 2008). Mike Monello is the executive creative director of the marketing agency Campfire and one of the people behind the Blair Witch project campaign as a viral reality campaign. In an interview he explains that the kind of storytelling that works online is different that the kinds of stories that work in movies and books. Linear stories are more difficult online.

Asked if this is happening only online or on IP-enabled platforms, he replies that it is not a matter of whether online or not or IP-enabled or not. For instance, WebTV or webisodes are places people return to, to catch up, but people lean back to see it and the sequences are easily presented in a chronological order that supports linear storytelling. However, places like YouTube and Facebook are places where we dip in and out and where we do not necessarily have to follow a linear path.

Therefore, he suggests that we think of the internet as performance media, not distribution media. To achieve successful marketing campaigns, entrepreneurial storytellers need to accept that it is about enabling people to build upon stories, instead of restricting them in the way it should be done (Monello 2011).

Games and narrative storytelling are related. Zimmerman and Salen refer to a way of distinguishing between linear and nonlinear. One way of describing the difference is by Greg Costikyan:

> *"a story is best envisioned as "beads on a string," a linear narrative; a game is best envisioned as a triangle of possibility, with the initial position at one apex, and possible conclusions along the opposite side, with myriad, ideally, infinite paths between initial state and outcome" - Greg Costikyan (Zimmermann and Salen 2004b:379).*

As a response to this definition of narrative stories, Salen and Zimmermann argue that it is not whether games are one or the other. Their point for game designers is *how* we can use these different understandings to create meaningful play.

In short viral reality marketing uses a strategy that can be best explained as a nonlinear story that helps it gain momentum. Here bits and pieces are put together in a cacophony of contributions across several platforms, in digital media as well as on television and in newspapers, by politicians, comedians, Youtubers, and regular people. Any attempt to map out a linear structure is impossible.

Yet, the creators of these campaigns retrospectively attempt to turn it into a linear story – a game all along – through re-introducing past events, i.e., the various bits of pieces from the various participants, as part of a whole story about the product. When rephrased as a game, the premise of retrospectively accepting to be fooled is more acceptable than a classic ad, or a story in serious news media. But as we have seen with the Speedbandits, sometimes the news media picks up viral stories and transforms them into something considered serious and real.

Game studies reminds us that several types of narrative are at play at the same time, and that mastering them requires an awareness of how and when boundaries are built and broken, as well as the ability to pay attention to retrospective changes in what it's all about. This literature moves beyond online versus offline and turns the focus to in and outside particular circles surrounded by shared ideas of what can be done within and across them. Magic circles have been used for their ability to emphasize the membrane's protection of the insides of a game from the outside. Whereas the viral content travels across platforms, the metaphor of the game suggests a way of thinking of the stories playing out within a sphere different from the outside. If success results in framing a staged viral story as a game, where people participate for the ride, accusations of lying and fooling people are not necessary. Furthermore, the game metaphor directs attention to a space that occupies both a specific time and place.

Ambiguity and intertextuality

Another strand of literature to bear in mind comes from public relation studies and their focus on crises management and strategic communication. Public relation studies introduce the concept of

strategic ambiguity (Eisenberg 2006; Miller, Joseph, and Apker 2000), which can be used as part of a deliberate attempt to divert attention away from undesired discussions. Instead of denying knowledge of documents on sensitive issues, one can for instance, question their existence and create disagreements amongst crowds about their authenticity. Public relation studies do not focus specifically on the role of digitally mediated settings. However, they do cover aspects of trustworthiness when it comes to brands as well as massive media attention. (Fitzpatrick and Gauthier 2001; Paul and Stribak 1997; Sellnow and Timothy 1997; Sim and Fernando 2010).

An empirical example on using strategic ambiguity, in which digital infrastructures play an important role, is the circulation of a manifesto written by the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik. On 22 July 2011, he bombed government buildings in Oslo and shot 69 people. Afterwards he said that his main motive for the atrocities was to market his manifesto; a far-right militant ideology in a compendium of texts entitled "2083 - A European Declaration of Independence", which he distributed electronically on the day of the attack. Counteraction in the form of "*Operation UnManifest"* was initiated by Anonymous, a loosely associated network of hacktivists[xv].

Anonymous encouraged their network to download the manifesto and change it.

> *"Change it, add stupid stuff, remove parts, shoop his picture, do what you like to. Republish it everywhere and up vote releases from other people. Declare that the faked ones are original. Let Anders become a joke, such that nobody will take him seriously anymore."(Pastebin.com 2011).*

This encouragement to diffuse stories is a good example of strategic ambiguity, as it became difficult to know for sure who was in possession of the original document. Digital infrastructures played a crucial role since participants affected not only the document but also rankings of it.

We can add a focus combining ethics and strategy from public relation studies with studies of brands. Strategic ambiguity can be useful in indicating connections as well as creating doubts about them. This has proven useful for several brands. Take for instance, a study of the 2009 Pepsi logo that emphasized an insinuated relationship between Pepsi and the election campaign of president Obama (Davisson and Booth 2010). Pepsi spent 1 million dollars and six months of work on developing a new logo and slogan, which they launched right before the election. Their logo bears a strong resemblance to that of the president's[xvi], insinuating a connection between the two. Whereas Obama used the slogan "Yes we can", Pepsi introduced theirs as "Yes you can." According to Davisson and Booth, Pepsi gained attention by suggesting cooperation between their brand and the president.

They also turned the focus onto the consumer, "you," and played with the double meaning of the word can (as both a verb and a noun). As with the switch from "we" to "you," the videos suggested that it was about the individual who was given a voice to utter their future hopes. Pepsi did not deny references to Obama, but did not confirm either. Instead they referred to underlying trends in culture that may have caused similarities in the two campaigns. (Like Obama, Companies Sell Own Brand Of Change n.d.). Theoretically Davisson and Booth point back to Bakhtin's concept of Utterance (Bakhtin 1982) and, building upon this, Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality (Kristeva 1980) as useful in understanding gaps left for an audience to fill in. This approach suggests, in line with my empirical data, that connections and references are important. It elaborates on the ability to read one text within the framework of another, which is a well-established genre within the field where I gathered data. Donohoe (O'Donohoe 2001) reminds us that ambiguity has been an element of advertising for a long time, and Fowls points to the increasingly leaky boundaries between advertising and popular culture (Fowles 1996).

Empirically, this calls for elaboration in a setting like viral reality marketing, where the marketing strategy is based on entering an already existing, well-established practice, of sharing, mixing matching, and mapping previously unrelated things on each other, parodying, and filling in gaps. These examples suggest that if we are operating with ambiguity, forgiveness is sometimes unnecessary. Since there are no claims but only indications, there is nothing to be blamed for later.

Other themes that can be used to elaborate on the avoidance of asking for forgiveness are found in jokes and detective stories. Jokes occupy spaces within which ambiguity is a key premise. Ambiguity is acceptable because it is part of the specific domain of jokes. By extension, comedians can communicate messages that would otherwise be offensive or too provocative, because it is done in a space in between fun and reality, where both coexist simultaneously. Jokes and comedy constitute a specific genre, a magic circle, where references are protected from being made directly, as when Pepsi did not reference Obama. Yet the relation between the two existed, since people did see them and make them. A final point to mention is that time plays a unique role in both jokes, and detective stories, as these genres of narratives can all provide explanations retrospectively. For the joke to come out right, listeners must be fooled at first. The same goes for detective histories, where the audience receives bits and hints in order to find the killer, but is deliberately mislead at first. Hints are laid out for the audience to appreciate the elimination of usual suspects one by one, before finally being able to find the true killer. Viral reality marketing campaigns can be seen as detective stories as well, as it

is part of the game to look through many theories and potential connections to get to know what it is all about. When it comes to games, adding the explanation that it was a game all along, is an attempt to rewrite history and reshuffle what it was all about from the very beginning. Using ambiguity strategically to entice participation, and then attempt to rewrite what it was all about retrospectively, when revealing the brand, is a core feature of viral reality marketing that I will elaborate further on.

1.2.3 Change as methodological challenge

Studies of relationships between fans and artists, between global and local, as well as in- and outside games, however, are not forced to have a binary view, analytically speaking. Instead of focusing on how fans and artists sometimes collaborate, and sometimes clash, we need to consider how to analytically treat such relations when they are held together by something that is both ambiguous and continuously changes. This is particularly important because viral reality marketing campaigns are deliberately designed to simultaneously encompass multiple, differing notions.

I will draw on a different analytical focus; an approach that treats various practices without analytically taking binaries (global vs local, fans vs artists, in- vs outside games) as opposites. They need not be contrasted or viewed as ends of a spectrum with opportunities for plotting items between them. The problem with these perspectives is that they rely on a fixed scale on which to measure. For instance, it makes sense to contrast global to local if something is the same, only with different features in global and local contexts. In viral reality marketing, it is deliberate ambiguity itself that keeps the relations intact and, thus, holds the campaign together. The new approach suggested captures and illuminates such ambiguities. It embraces conflicts, incoherence, as well as elements that are not easily mapped directly on to each other. As an overall concept, we refer to it as a concern for shape-shifting moving objects.

1.2.3.1 Immutable mobiles, mutable mobiles, and the achievement of stability

Theoretically, shape-shifting moving objects are recurring analytical concerns in several studies of complex phenomena in science and technology studies (Law and Singleton 2000; Law and Singleton 2003; Law 1986; Law 2002a; de Laet and Mol 2000; Annemarie Mol 2002; Berg and Mol 1998). These concerns for how to analytically treat and capture objects that are both shared yet different, while *also* changing are highly relevant to consider when it comes to viral reality marketing. We have stories that are subjected to multiple interpretations, and thus are both one globally shared story and at the same time, many local interpretations of it. But the stories in viral reality marketing also change from being a potentially true story, to potentially an ad, and finally a confirmed ad for a specific

brand. And the more participants contribute to these various versions of the story, the more versions come into being. Therefore, we must attend to the features of something that both mutates and increases in ambiguity, while at the same time manages to keep its stability as a campaign. This is what the final body of literature will deal with.

Two things are worth emphasizing explicitly in this approach: the *inclusion of non-human actors*, and the focus on the *relations between changes and stability*. One of the first contributions dealing with both human and non-humans and relations that stay intact despite traveling is found in laboratory studies, where Bruno Latour is concerned with how scientific facts are produced through references. In his study of whether the savannah increases or decreases over time, Latour centers his study around the question: *"How do we pack the world into words?"* (Latour 1999:24). He is particularly interested in "reference" as a philosopher, and not in its "context" as a sociologist. His emphasis is therefore not on explaining, but on tracing and accounting for the minute details of converting the savannah to first the soil samples representing it in the lab, and then to an academic paper, which speaks on its behalf with words, graphs, and comparisons of numbers. The savannah is transformed in shape, as well as moved geographically.

The first question in scientific facts traveling according to Latour is: how to ensure that they stay intact while moving from one lab to another, and from one representation to another. If we want to ensure that scientific facts travel unhindered, work is often delegated to non-human actors. Since the savannah cannot be brought back to the lab, or fit into an academic paper directly, a small number of pertinent features representing it are transported and translated. A network of relations helps keep the pertinent features of the savannah intact while it travels. Latour describes the savannah as an immutable mobile. It is mobile since it is open to translations, as the samples of soil, while removed from the savannah, still speak on behalf of it. It is immutable because some types of relations are kept intact (Latour 1999:306–307).

The interest in immutable mobiles helps to raise the question of what needs to be kept in place for something to stay the same despite traveling. Theoretically, this way of conceptualizing objects provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between similarities and differences necessary for an object to remain stable, despite conversion in various formats. The approach, however, has also met with criticism. It has been pointed out, that behind any stabilization of objects, there is invisible work. Objects are not inherently stable. This critique has been raised and thoroughly discussed by Star (Star 1990) and Haraway (Haraway 1997).

Objects, however, can be stable by other means. Mol and de Laet direct attention to objects achieving their stability by changing. In their study of the Zimbabwe bush pump, they argue that the pump is a mutable mobile, i.e., it keeps stability by changing slowly. The pump is a piece of technology, which holds promises of various realities simultaneously, while remaining a single object. This mutable mobile is considered a fluid object. It keeps stability by changing relations, not by keeping them intact. (de Laet and Mol 2000)

These concerns for objects and the relationship between maintaining stability and changing relations are relevant to keep in mind for theoretical approaches to viral reality marketing. They allow for the direction of attention to what provides an object its stability. Stability may not only be achieved by fixing relations, but can also be obtained by shifting them. Yet asking how it stays intact despite of, as well as because of, shifting relations is an obvious analytical starting point since, in viral reality marketing, the campaign is assumed to achieve stability through ambiguity. Viral reality marketing campaigns grow by traveling between people, and across domains. They gain momentum through the continuous appearance of new relations made between content elements, spurred on by lack of information and absence of confirmation. They consist of rumors and potentials, and continuously shift shape. In the beginning, as participants play detectives, they are potentially ads for unconfirmed brands, as well as potentially true stories. Later they become confirmed campaigns for specific brands. These features make it difficult to view the campaign as the same object subjected to various interpretations. Shape-shifting moving objects help to cast light on something that grows *because* of its shape-shifting features.

1.2.3.1 Mutable mobiles applied

The concepts of mutable mobiles, shape-shifting moving objects, and fluidity have been well used across several sciences. However, they have been applied mostly to studies that are assumed to have complex objects of study that figure across several domains, while shared between diverse groups. Common to these studies is that they face objects that are considered difficult to grasp. They are often concerned with asking broad questions, often related to the emergence of new technologies, and most studies use the theoretical approach on larger and more overall phenomena such as mobile phones, digital data, and tourism.

One such example is Peggy Jubien who set out to elaborate on why mobile phones are more complex than assumed in education. She set out to *"learn about the multiple entanglements of students, teachers and smartphones in overlapping networks*" while examining the pedagogical practices

created within these assemblages (Jubien 2013:1). She used the concept of fire objects, an object that, like the fluid object, obtains its stability by shifting relations. However, as the fluid object does so gradually, the fire object achieves its stability through abrupt changes and through patterns of discontinuity. Absence and presence are key concepts, and sometimes parts of an object must be absent for it to appear present – a theoretical elaboration that I find highly relevant to consider in relation to viral reality marketing as well. Yet, when it comes to pinpointing absences and presences, there is some unclarity in Jubien's analysis. Jubien argues that a focus on absences and presences is relevant when studying users of smartphones, because there are obvious patterns of absence and presence made possible through these devices. *"These notions of fluid and fire objects (which overlap and share similarities) captured some of the messy*[13] *and unpredictable qualities of smartphones in post-secondary education."* (Jubien 2013:5). Here, smartphones are considered to be the shape-shifting moving objects that come into being from a pattern of absences and presences. But through the empirical examples, it is the user who, through the smartphone can manipulate his or her presence and absences. *"The smartphone permits Adam to manipulate his presence and absence; at one moment, he is present in the library and absent from his apartment, and in the next, he is virtually present in his apartment building and physically present in the library."* (Jubien 2013). Therefore, the study does not as such contribute to shape-shifting moving objects, here, with mobile phones, achieving stability because of a specific relationship between absences and presences. Instead, it ends up illustrating how absences and presences become visible because of the phone.

Another study that sees fluid objects and mutable mobiles as useful theoretical tools is Terrie Lynn Thompson's who used it to tackle the large phenomenon of digital data. Thompson takes as a starting point, data shared. *"[…] coded materialities (the digital in all its forms, including software, devices, networks, artefacts, and algorithms) are notoriously fickle. Digital things are often described as unbounded, evasive, distributed, and constantly mutating"* (Thompson 2014:431). This led Thompson to ask how networked learning researchers reckon with these mobilities and multiplicities. She called on ANT to explore how the digital interposes data within the research process – freezing, thawing, excluding, including – beckoning researchers to attend to the sociality of data. To cope with this, she introduced the concepts of fluid and fire objects and raised the question: "how can [these

[13] Jubien does not define "messy" but the term she refers to is John Law's concept (Law 2006). "Messy" refers to a situation in which the object of ethnographic research is interpretatively complex to such a degree that the ethnographer may become trapped in the attempt to capture all of the various facets of the object. Law's point is that if a phenomenon appears difficult to grasp, complex, incoherrent or contradictory, then something less messy, a framework or a concept will instead make a mess of describing it. See also (Law & Singleton, 2005)

concepts] reveal new aspects of data traveling?" Following this, she concluded that to grasp mobility of data, fluid objects and absence and presence captured and illuminated new aspects of what data is, by helping to *"draw contrasts, articulate silent layers, turn questions upside down, focus on the unexpected, add to one's sensitivities, propose new terms, and shift stories from one context to another"* (Thompson 2014:433). But it is not digital data in general that was her object of study. Her analysis was a metanalysis of how participants in a symposium have used the concepts of data diversely. Her analysis was an attempt to grasp differences in uses of the same shared concept of digital data. It seems that between this aim to grasp data defined as *"digital in all its forms",* and the actual empirical material represented, even though the fluidity approach is considered useful to treat all large, undefined, and widely shared phenomena, boundary-making is still an issue. It became clear that using fluidity and shape-shifting moving objects does not solve the issue with boundary-making, when attending to complex and "seemingly messy" phenomena. Instead, it suggests an active awareness of boundary-making and its consequences.

Just as Thompson used fluid objects to analyze how others use shared concepts differently, Richard Ek performed a metanalysis of other studies and their use of the concept of tourism. Fire objects have also been used to study how others, in studies of tourism write about social media and its role related specifically to tourism. (Ek 2013). Richard Ek argued that, *"social media as represented in other studies of tourism is messy"*. The intention was to introduce and explore what kind of new research questions could be asked if social media was imagined as something not easily compartmentalized and tangible, but instead as fluid and spatially more complex than a distinct ''object in space'' (Ek 2013:21). Ek takes as starting point, something that is considered messy by directly referring to Law's concept of mess while using fluidity and fire objects as new ways of grasping this. John Law's concept of mess was part of a greater methodological concern for things that may have a character that is altered and simplified by most methods. Common to the work of Thomson and Ek is the way they have located phenomena that is assumed to be complex. Furthermore, they have used these as means for metanalysis; to grasp other's use of the concepts. This takes them in a different direction when it comes to shape-shifting moving objects, which deals neither with non-human nor with how stability is achieved despite, as well as because of, differences.

Whereas these studies are more concerned with the theoretical relation between concepts, there are other studies that attend more specifically to empirical material. Technologies that are under development, which are to be shared between groups with multiple interests, across many sites are

considered empirically complex and are often discussed with reference to shape-shifting moving objects and fluidity. These studies approach technologies while *embracing* the double-sidedness in objects as being both shared, yet locally adapted simultaneously. Studies that have served as inspiration for me are those about different medical practices such as studies of electronic patient records, in which the representation of the patient is digital, and hence shared across domains, hospital wards and between different specialties. (Svenningsen 2003; Jensen 2004) These studies are concerned with the way the digital representation of the patient is shared across domains and used differently in various local settings. Fluidity has also been linked to several medical conditions, such as liver disease (Law and Singleton 2003; Law and Singleton 2000), atherosclerosis (Annemarie Mol 2002) as well as differences in medicine (Berg and Mol 1998). Common to all these studies is that they specifically attend to the *relation* of an object being one and multiple simultaneously.

When trying to grasp viral reality marketing, these approaches allow for a shift from concerns of a global campaign contrasted to the various local responses; to a fluid approach that has a focus on the way shape-shifting moving objects achieve and maintain stability because of their ambiguous and constantly shifting relations. Videos are not just traveling objects that hold the campaign together, they shift shape as well. This is crucial as we are not just studying a video versus its local responses; we want to explore the intriguing mechanisms that make participants contribute and add to the confusion of what is going on.

1.2.3.3 Multiplicity, ontology, and methodological awareness

The academic field and tradition to which this thesis belongs, Science and Technology Studies, is inseparably linked to a mindset that requires an explicit focus on non-human actors. These are not "more important" than human actors but must simply not be distinguished a priori from them. Key parts of this field also reject reality as a fixed constant. There is no single truth, and multiple "realities" may be practiced simultaneously. Some of the influencing studies that have put multiplicity on the agenda are Annemarie Mol's studies. Multiplicity is a key term here:

> *"[...]objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated. As such object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies." (Annemarie Mol 2002:5).*

In "Cutting Surgeons, Walking Patients: Some Complexities Involved in Comparing", Mol raises the issue of comparison between walking therapy and operations as treatments for arterial disease in the lower limbs (A. M. Mol 2002). She discusses how a seemingly simple phenomenon such as

atherosclerosis is, in practice enacted in multiple ways. She deliberately uses the term *multiple* in favor of ambiguous, incoherent, and conflicting, to distance herself from a pluralistic social constructive way of thinking. Instead of seeing atherosclerosis as one thing that can be approached from various perspectives, the concept of the multiple directs attention to how it is enacted in different ways, in different situations, places, and practices simultaneously. And this is where methods play a role. For attending to multiplicity is about seeing both objects and the worlds as never singular.

Along with concepts and their sole theoretical value, the literature concerned with fluidity adds a methodological awareness when it comes to speaking of objects as well as worlds. It is concerned with how a particular world is enacted, and it directs specific attention to researchers and the positions from which they speak. This literature advocates a shift from epistemology to ontology. Epistemology is about acknowledging that while there might be one object, or one reality, there are various perspectives on that object or reality that exist simultaneously. Capturing the nuances of such variations gets us closer to understanding the object. Ontology distances itself from getting closer to the object or to reality, since reality itself is left untouched. Whereas ANT abandons concepts such as reality as a priori distinction (Latour 2005; Latour 1996a), shifting to ontology celebrates it, however in plural. This pluralistic approach is not concerned with measuring them up against each other. Instead, it states that there are many ways of knowing an object, and there are many ways of practicing the multiple versions of it. Questions such as "what to make of an object?" are exchanged for, "how are multiple versions of it being practiced?" Annemarie Mol, suggests that new questions emerge as the objects handled in practice are not the same from one site to another:

> *"If practices are foregrounded there is no longer a single passive object in the middle, waiting to be seen from the point of view of seemingly endless series of perspectives."* (Mol 2002:5).

Instead, objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated. As such, objects of manipulation tend to differ from one practice to another, and reality multiplies. Therefore, she suggests specifically to attend to the multiplicity of reality.

Representation and intervention

I have taken inspiration from studies concerned with shape-shifting moving objects. (Law and Mol 2001; Leigh Star 2010; Star and Griesemer 1989; Zeiss and Groenewegen 2009) (Law 1986) in particular different topologies (Law 2002a; Law 2002b; Law 2000). This has to do with the acknowledgements of methods as active enactments. However, along with the concern for practices

and enactments of objects lies another implicit matter; the role of the researcher. For the researcher actively participates in enacting objects, when *studying objects* as well as *representing them in writing retrospectively*.

The first matter came up as a methodological concern regarding gathering data around ads when informants considered them differently. It is not sufficient to simply distinguish between campaign leaders wanting to create brand awareness and the participants enabling this by passing on content, when the latter group is highly diverse. It is not a given that all participants care about the brand, or even that they are aware of it. This dichotomy calls for awareness of the researcher's challenges and responsibilities in bringing concepts and ascribed roles of informants into the field. The implications of choosing between different options for analytically framing the concept of participation will be a recurring theme throughout this dissertation.

The concerns for the researcher's position, both when gathering data and when writing about it afterwards are issues that need exceptional attention in the specific field of viral reality marketing. Signe Vikkelsø (Vikkelsø 2007) provides considerations useful to both these concerns. She emphasizes that researchers who follow the actors (Latour, 1987) or do praxiography (Mol, 2002) must take into consideration that informants – just like researchers – are cartographers, to whom the emerging descriptions are strategic opportunities or threats. Vikkelsø bridges the gap between ANT and the after-ANT agenda elaborated on by Mol, Law and others (Annemarie Mol 2002; Law 2002a; Law and Moser 1999). She defines it as multiplicity-oriented ANT. This allows her to attend to coexisting and partly connected versions of reality as they are enacted. Both researcher and informants enact these simultaneously.

The researcher's descriptions are not passive ones, but active enactments of particular versions of objects, worlds, and realities. No description leaves the described untouched, as the object and the agency of observation are inseparable. Likewise, informants, as well as objects are not just passively waiting to be described. They may resist, or they may be eager to be described. Resistance may come from actors, who are part of a large, powerful network, and wish to keep secret the kinds of allies and actions that help to establish this power, but it may also come from something so simple as a nurse resisting being followed by the ethnographer as she secretly withdraws to have a break and rest her legs. Eagerness to be described, likewise, highlights how informants have interests in which they include the researcher as her engagement becomes part of their individual strategies. A good

description, Vikkelsø argues, is one that is put at risk by being exposed to multiple audiences, and that is aware of the way it also puts others at risk through descriptions.

Descriptions are never just that. Stories rarely start when the researcher enters; entering is done into already established practices. The relationship between researcher and informants is not just a simple collaboration to reach a shared goal or solve a shared mystery (Vikkelsø 2007:300). Vikkelsø's concerns are highly relevant to bear in mind specifically when it comes to viral reality marketing and its consequences for the researcher. The features of viral reality marketing call for sensitivity when it comes to creating a narrative retrospectively that is kept together by its uncertainties and ambiguities.

Other noteworthy studies are from John Law, looking at the British attempt to build a military aircraft (Law 2002a) and Bruno Latour, on the French attempt to build a guided transportation system (Latour 1996b). Both made specific choices in their style of writing in order to represent actors playing crucial roles. They explicitly avoided narratives taking innovation as the starting point, and projecting it back in time, as though it had always existed. Furthermore, they gave voice to their earlier selves in order to highlight how they too had shifted position in the process.

Studies of shape-shifting moving objects, ontologies, and multiple realities direct attention back to the researcher and her accesses, but also create awareness of how informants as well, are positioned in networks of relations that cut off or enhance some types of information. They signal the importance of paying attention to fractal perspectives based on positioning in a specific time and place. Whereas studies dealing with shape-shifting moving objects and how stability is achieved have not yet been related to viral reality marketing, theoretical concepts and concerns for specific methodologies hold promise for new ways of approaching viral reality marketing. They provide new ways of thinking about a phenomenon that is both globally shared, while at the same time locally interpreted, but at the same time continuously growing as a consequence of changes as well as its ambiguous character. In chapter five I will go into further details about this.

Before continuing to the second chapter, an outline of the remaining chapters is provided to give an idea of what is to come.

1.3 Outline of chapters

Chapter 2 presents a range of theoretical approaches to the concepts of users, producers, and innovations. The variation in roles ascribed to the users in the analysis of innovation is discussed, as users vary from being relatively passive receivers that are resources to innovators, to being the

primary source from where innovations emerge. As participants in viral reality marketing, they are both the sources of new content while at the same time a resource to those who want to create specific brand awareness. This double role calls for an improved analytical approach to the complexities of user roles. The concept of innovation likewise, is discussed by presenting a theoretical approach that represents innovations as existing independent of, and prior to, meeting the user. In this approach, the theoretical interest is centered on the user, not the innovation. (Rogers 2003). This is discussed and contrasted to another theoretical perspective, where the innovation is not considered as a concept useful to describe what circulates or those engaging with it. This latter approach considers innovation as neither preexisting nor stable. Instead innovation is constantly in the making. (Latour 1986; Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002a; Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002b). From these juxtapositions, we learn how concepts of users and innovations need further theoretical exploration.

Chapter 3 presents and analyzes various examples of marketing campaigns, real time marketing, and social media games. These are used to pinpoint potentiality and temporality as central issues. The empirical examples also serve to put a specific emphasis on the challenges encountered by the ethnographer in the field, by the analyst creating order in cacophonous stories, and finally by the writer retrospectively accounting for them to the readers, who are separated from the field in both time and frame of reference.

Chapter 4 presents and analyzes three specific viral reality marketing campaigns with government financed Danish companies trying to reach citizens with specific information. Building on the preceding chapters, it presents the analytical implications of describing collaborations between actors, where relations are not the same on all sides. We find that actors may appear as the same from one side while being distinct from another; actors may collaborate without being aware, or they may collaborate despite conflicting interests. All these ambiguous relations serve to illustrate a need for thinking differently about such relations.

Chapter 5 contemplates the different academic stages: gathering data, analyzing it, and finally presenting it. As the object of study is changing, these different stages, and the methodological concerns that should go into moving between them, are discussed. Modes of ordering (Law 2004) are brought up as a methodological concern, and different modes of ordering for the researcher throughout the process are discussed.

Additionally, this chapter will direct specific attention to present and future orientation respectively (Brown, Webster, and Rappert 2000; Michael and Brown 2010). These perspectives are useful when studying sporadic, ambiguous, and messy interactions. In addition to present and future as orientations, a final orientation towards absence is suggested. An emphasis on constancy as an effect of discontinuity and a specific analytical focus on relations between absence and presence is discussed. Sometimes objects stay stable because they fix relations, (Law 1986), sometimes by shifting relations (Annemarie Mol 2002), and finally some keep stable through a relation between presence and absence. In this latter approach, stability is explained by focusing on what must necessarily be absent for something else to be present. (Law and Mol 2001). The emphasis of absence and discontinuity provides a theoretical contribution to the concept of shape-shifting moving objects that allows us to elaborate on how something can travel and change radically, while keeping certain elements intact. Methodologically, this chapter suggests clarity and directs specific attention to the role of the researcher and her shifting positions throughout the process.

The conclusion emphasizes how novel insights may be uncovered through the use the concepts of ambiguity, potentiality, and temporality. Having these concepts specifically in mind, encourages attention to phenomena and interactions that are difficult to grasp and might otherwise be seen as a hindrance to focusing on the object of study. Deliberately looking for temporalities, potentiality, and ambiguity encourages focus on uncertainty, open ends, and multiple possible versions. Doing so is crucial when attending to matters that are both sudden, intensive, highly digitally mediated, and subject to massive attention.

2. Users, innovation, and driving forces

This chapter contains two distinct but related discussions of innovation processes. Throughout the chapter, agency and driving forces are discussed in order to elaborate on how innovations come into being, as well as how they retain their position.

The first part of the chapter explores the relationship between users, producers, and innovations; and contemplates whether the innovation originates from the producers or the users. As a further elaboration of the relation between stability and changes, the second part presents two theoretical approaches to ways innovations and users are related in innovation processes. The two approaches provide distinct and contrasting conceptualizations regarding what is changed and how that change is effectuated; they address agency differently when it comes to the relations between users, producers, and innovations. Their main concepts of diffusion and translation are contrasted and related specifically to viral reality marketing.

2.1 Viral reality marketing – an example

As we saw in previous examples there already exists an environment in which people share, modify, and communicate through making references. In viral marketing, companies and advertising agencies try to utilize this as a resource. They often do so by creating something that is both entertainment and yet at the same time advertisement, to encourage information dissemination. Furthermore, in viral *reality* marketing a new trend has emerged over the last few years. Companies and advertising agencies attempt to boost dissemination even more, by creating ambiguous content that allows people to add their personal touch, as they fill in gaps and put together pieces of information to create new stories.

As an appetizer for the theoretical discussions in this chapter, and as an empirical reminder why the relationship between innovation, driving forces, and users, is highly relevant, I will give a brief introduction to a viral reality marketing case. Later, it will be analyzed further, but for now it serves to illustrate how participants actively shape the campaign.

In 2009, VisitDenmark attempted to send a message to people outside Denmark making them aware of Denmark as a nice country worth visiting. On their professional team was an ad agency, Grey, which developed and refined the idea for the story that was told, and a professional Seeder, GoViral, which made sure the story got reach through various digital platforms.

Together they produced and seeded a video that was soon to be found on YouTube, Facebook, and blogs. The video contained a story of a mother who was looking for the father of her child. She confessed to the camera, that she met the father, a visiting foreigner 1½ year ago, and that she had wanted to show him what "hygge"[14] was. As a result of the "hygge" she got pregnant. The purpose of the story was to generate interest among as many as possible, thus creating awareness of Denmark as a nice safe place to visit (Politiken 2009). Along with the video, the mother had made a homepage with pictures of herself and the child along with a message board where people could send messages – supposedly if they had any useful information concerning the father[xvii].

When the time was right VisitDenmark had planned to reveal that the mother was in fact an actress, and that the media stunt was pulled off by them, to create awareness of Denmark as a nice place to visit. Unfortunately, they were granted only a few days, before someone else revealed the mother to be an actress, and the child to be someone else's.

However, before they publicly confirmed that it was a campaign, many different responses had already emerged in relation to this story.

→ Some people started attacking the story's trustworthiness. This was done in many places simultaneously: on the message board, in threads on Facebook, in comments on blogs and on the various YouTube channels that had uploaded the video. These attacks mostly dealt with how the mother was too good looking and too confident to appear realistic, and how she was far too carefree to be an actual mom.

→ Others started defending the mother, telling her directly, on her homepage, that *they* believed her, and that she should just ignore all those who did not. These people offered their true support and empathy.

→Hitler Rants Parodies of course, comes into play in several versions. In one version Hitler is informed that the girl he met and had fun with while in Denmark became pregnant and is now looking for the father[xviii].

→ A marketing company made a public response to declare that *they* were not behind it, and that they distanced themselves from dishonest advertising.

[14] According to Danes at least, hygge is a non-translatable term, yet somewhat similar to "coziness." Practicing "hygge" is something that the Danish consider a uniquely Danish trait.

→ As the attention grew even more copies of the mother were uploaded to YouTube. Along with videos of the mother, a pattern of new videos emerged, in which fathers, in humoristic ways, searched for the mother. This was a mix of unknown people and public figures primarily comedians and famous Youtubers who promoted themselves by twisting elements of the story, for instance, by replacing the baby's bottle of milk with a bottle of beer or replacing the baby with a teddy bear.

→ Other marketing stunts became related to it. Marketing experts discussed how the story was potentially a rip off from a Danish artist's attempt to make the public aware of his name. This artist put up a poster at a music festival with the text *"Mathias from Ørebro. Where are you? Remember last year at Roskilde? I never got your last name. This is your son"*[xix] followed by a picture of a child and a suggested meeting place two days later at the festival. This was a stunt to gather curious people's attention and make them remember the artist's name: "HuskMitNavn"[15]-

→ Immediately after someone had found out that the "mother" was in fact an actress, a group of bloggers started discussing what this presumed advertising was for, suggesting that it could be the actress promoting herself. They also suggested that the homepage provider she was using could be the potential company behind it, thereby showing how much a homepage can do. Others suggested that it was a condom company raising awareness for safe sex.

→ A journalist who had been writing in his newspaper about the mother, believing the story to be true, discovered that he was misled, and by extension had mislead readers. As it was revealed to be a campaign from VisitDenmark, the angry journalist volunteered to be interviewed along with the managing director of VisitDenmark on national television during prime time. He argued that Denmark had been branded on a lie, and he felt deceived. The managing director however, defended her story, by saying that it was posted on YouTube, where people never take things too seriously. She further argued that it showed how Denmark is a free country, where young single mothers can have good, decent, and independent lives. From the substantial headlines of the newspapers. In the following days, the journalist seemed to have succeeded in making his version as the most convincing interpretation.

→ VisitDenmark apologized for the campaign and decided to remove the video from the internet. However, many people had already downloaded local copies which they instantly re-uploaded, and

[15] In English, RememberMyName

because of the removal, even more interpretations of the father's response, as well as new mothers seeking fathers (for their teddy bears, dolls, and puppies) were made in the following weeks.

→ The leader of VisitDenmark stepped down because of the campaign. Two others were fired, and the news media suggested that the leader would have been fired had she not stepped down. Confirming if this is what really happened was not possible, for both Grey and VisitDenmark referred to press releases and did neither confirm nor deny that the people who no longer held their jobs were fired because of the campaign.

→ The advertising agency Grey announced that they ended collaboration with VisitDenmark without going into details as to why.

→ The press was kept busy with guessing, analyzing, and calling in experts to explain what had been going on.

I will go into the campaign in depth later, but for now it serves to illustrate the complexity when it comes to categorizing who are users, innovators as well as what the innovation is.

2.2. The role of users in user-driven innovation

The concept of user-driven innovation is one of the core concepts in the project "Virtual worlds - Sense-making and Innovation" of which my PhD project has been a part. One of the primary reasons for choosing viral marketing as an object of study in the first place, was that I found it interesting in relation to the concept of user-driven innovation. From the very beginning, I believed that the question of whether ads can spread and infect people in the same way viruses can, could lead me to a better understanding of user-driven innovation in an empirical setting. The argument was that there was an *interesting shift in the role of the users* in this type of advertising compared to other forms. My initial assumption was that users were the *driving force*, since, in viral marketing, they participate actively as opposed to more traditional marketing where they are considered passive receivers. But as the introduction to this dissertation suggests, we are dealing with a complex setting, where the role of user and producer are difficult to separate empirically, and where algorithms' scripts and other digital infrastructures act as amplifiers, thereby playing an active role in dissemination as well. Studies of user-driven innovation alone are not suited to cover this sufficiently. However, they have a great theoretical value since, instead of *dividing* into users and innovation, they allow us to question the *relationship* between them. Later in this chapter I will go into detail with the role on non-human

actors such as digital infrastructures and algorithms. For now, user-driven innovation is used as a starting point for a more extensive theoretical discussion of the role of users in innovation processes.

2.2.1 Users as a resource for innovators

One way I have directed my search for literature on user-driven innovation is by focusing on studies that include Danish companies and are concerned specifically with user-driven innovation within the public sector. This has a great contextual value, since the three cases of viral reality marketing I encountered, have several things in common that fit with this strand of literature: all were financed by the Danish government, and they all targeted citizens. They reached out with messages to the public, while using the same methods that viral marketing does when promoting products. The question that concerned me was whether the same way of sending messages and creating awareness that is used on potential consumers, will also work for citizens, and whether it makes a difference if the sender is a publicly funded organization as opposed to a company that makes profit from sales. At this point it should be mentioned that viral reality marketing had mostly been used to promote movies, and primarily in the US. Therefore, the format was not well known to Danes yet, and most certainly not in the context of communication between government and citizens.

There were similar attempts to reach people with these methods in other countries. This included attempts that did not seek profit but aimed to create public awareness of ways to help others. The case I find most inspiring was a Dutch reality television program which portrayed a supposedly terminally ill 37-year-old woman donating a kidney to one of twenty-five people in need of a new kidney. Before the grand finale there was a selection, after which only three people remained. Viewers were invited to participate in giving the donator advice on who to choose as the receiver. Towards the end of the show, it was revealed to the public, that although the three candidates were real kidney patients; they were aware that the supposedly terminally ill woman was an actress, and the show was a stunt to raise awareness of the importance of getting more donors. They all voluntarily participated to create awareness about the limited number of organ donors in the Netherlands and to get the shortage of donors back on the political agenda. Thus, the idea of communicating noncommercial messages through controversial staged stories was not new and I was aware of it from the beginning of the dissertation. Yet it is important to remember, that in Denmark such campaigns had not been seen before.

In hindsight it turned out that this new way of creating awareness in Denmark only had the three major cases. But at the time of writing the focus on user-driven innovation – based on the affiliation

with the virtual worlds and user-driven innovation- and the promising pattern of several publicly funded organizations using this kind of advertising, shaped the context around my dissertation. Therefore, the connection between user-driven innovation, and the public sector in Denmark was highly relevant at the time. In addition, the concept of user-driven innovation had gained much attention the last ten years in Denmark particularly within the public sector. Since all my cases of viral reality marketing are made, and financed, by the Danish public sector, the literature provided in this section illustrates, and deals with, differences between the public and private sector, with the advantage that we get insights in some of the practical challenges when converting business models – such as user-driven innovation, from the private sector into the public sector.

User-driven innovation as a concept has grown in influence in Denmark over the last few years. According to the annual report on the government's strategy for further ensuring high quality in the public sector of 2007, particularly two elements play a crucial role in considering user-driven innovation. Firstly, there is the financial challenge due to the growing amount of elderly people and diminished group of working people, which results in a demand for more resources. Secondly, the new technology available enables new types of services for the citizens. These have led the Danish government to emphasize "innovation of the public services" (Danish Government 2006). In November 2006, the Danish Government entered into an agreement with three of the biggest political parties (Erhverv & Byggestyrelsen 2011). As a part of that agreement, under the theme "Denmark as leading innovative country," 100 million Danish Crowns, per year from 2007 to 2009 was marked for a special program for user-driven innovation. The program was the first of its kind in the world and was administered by the Business and Building government agency. The purpose of the program was to strengthen the development of new products, services, concepts, and processes in businesses as well as public institutions through increased use of user-driven innovation. By looking more closely at this program, it becomes clear how user-driven innovation is conceptualized, what roles are ascribed to the users, and where the innovation comes from.

According to the declaration for the program, subsidies are given to projects that develop and test methods for user-driven innovation. The Business and Building government agency define user-driven innovation as:

> *"The process by which one obtains knowledge from the users for the purpose of developing new products. A process of user-driven innovation is based on an understanding of user needs and a systematic involvement of the users"*[xx]*. (Emily and Høgenhaven 2008; Rosted 2005).*

They emphasize that user-driven innovation is about involving the users in the innovation process in new ways. By focusing on the user's currently existing needs, as well as future needs, products, and services, which more effectively and precisely comply with these needs can be created. This includes needs that the users might not yet have recognized. According to the program manifesto, innovation that takes point of departure in the user's recognized and unrecognized needs is more bulletproof and has a greater chance of obtaining commercial success and increases satisfaction among (future) users. Thus, user-driven innovation is seen as an important tool for strengthening the Danish business community's competitive position and to create better welfare solutions for the public sector.

Let us start with three examples that illustrate how users, innovators and innovations are conceptualized.

"Intelligent building materials" 2-year project. Budget: 2.7 million Danish Crowns.

> *"The innovation is building materials that communicate with the user. This is made possible through the combination of IT and building materials. With this combination the outcome expected is intelligent." (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008)*

According to the manager of the project Kristine van het Erve Grunnet, the idea has been obvious all along. The only reason innovation has not yet been realized is that the producers of the material have not been convinced that anyone is willing to pay for intelligent materials. In addition, the IT suppliers and the producers come from two different worlds that have not communicated before (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008: 5). Here the innovation consists of bringing together two previously unrelated elements, the material and the opportunities provided by IT. The innovators are the people behind the project and their entrepreneurial role is in bringing together two previously unrelated worlds. Users are the ones who, in the end, determine whether the innovation will be successful, as they decide whether to spend money on it or not. Bringing in users early in the process enables the innovators to figure out if a need for IT support in building material is present. If the users see the value in it, and are willing to invest in it, then the innovators will know their innovation is worth developing further.

Serious games interactive" 3-year project. Budget 2.5 million Danish Crowns.

> *"Lead users play a major role.[…] [they] are assumed to have needs that the rest will get at a later point. The innovation, a game for school children, is a tool that enables the lead users, i.e., teachers to engage their students in the education through computer games. By allowing teachers to try out the games themselves or engaging students, they*

> *can provide valuable feedback on what sort of support the design of the game can provide."* (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008: 7)

Here, the students might be the end-users when playing the game, however, the relevant users to involve are not the players but the teachers, who can hopefully enhance their teaching. The innovation resides with the game designers who have combined teaching with something the students are assumed to think is fun. Thus, even though no end users are included directly, the students and teachers are assumed to have needs in terms of teaching that exceeds traditional books. This shows that users are not only providing knowledge about needs, (recognized or not) they are also customized and surrounded with assumptions as a new innovation is presented. The innovation is the game that is made by the innovators. It is the combination of assumed needs of teachers and students.

Customer needs" 20 months project. 7.4 million Danish Crowns.

The project is about a few shops for sports equipment, using user involvement to be able to better know the needs of the users when shopping, to provide better services for them. To better understand the experience of the customer, stores across the country were used as test facilities. The customers, the employees and the store area were surveyed with cameras. According to the project manager these recordings helped to retain the Customers' experiences. They helped to confirm or reject the assumptions of customer based on specific behavior. One example emphasized was whether the fitting room was big enough.

> *"By going through the recordings it was no longer about assumptions, instead the employees had reality to relate to".* (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008:13)

The result for the stores, was that some products were placed differently according to size and brand, respectively. Further, because of the newly gained awareness of the shop through video recordings, an increased focus on keeping things in order in the stores was achieved. The employees agreed that it had been an eye opener to involve the users, and by showing recordings to the employees the need for enhancements had been easier for them to relate to (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008: 13). This case had the most passive group of users, since they were not aware or their participation. It is only the actions of the users, not their explanations and opinions, which were considered relevant. With this method the store risked missing differences between what users do and how they experience it. Cameras might have proved that there was plenty of space while the customers felt differently. The assumption was that needs are measured from actions not opinions. Here the innovation was the

camera enabling employees to get an insight into consumer behavior that they do not normally have access to.

In all three cases, we see that the users' role is passive, and when active, the purpose of their involvement is to extract knowledge about their needs. User-driven innovation is a method, and users are a resource in testing and developing an already assumed innovation. The innovation lies in bringing previously unrelated elements together, and those who do so are the innovators. From this objective we see that users are considered important, yet they are a resource for those who develop products for them – the innovators. Even though these studies provide no knowledge on viral reality marketing, they illustrate a very fixed concept of users, innovators, and innovations.

The user-driven discourse within the Danish public sector is not only a key to successes; it is also subjected to more critical voices. In the wake of the focus on user-driven innovation in the public sector, a lot of consideration has gone into whether a concept successful in the private sector could be converted in the public sector. Reports on implementing user-driven innovation from the private to the public sector agree on this concern and emphasize that the two sectors pursue very different objectives (van Duivenboden and Thaens 2008; Halvorsen et al. 2005; Kristensen 2007). Where private firms strive to maximize profit and enhance their position in the market, public organizations engage in implementing the policies outlined by politicians aiming at increased welfare, democracy, and legitimacy. Birgit Jæger argues that we have to re-define the concept in a way that reflects the conditions for the public sector. (Birgit Jæger 2011). She notes that the user-role is complicated as *"users are citizens, clients, customers, participants, firms, staff",* meaning they are sometimes both responsible for the delivered service and purchaser of it. Users cover a variety of roles at many levels. The role of users must be elaborated on since it constitutes a large group of heterogeneous individuals. The concept of users is complex. Even though the above-mentioned projects are not about viral reality marketing, they provide insights to a particular way of conceptualizing the relation between users and innovations: a role where the users as actively participating is not present. The innovation and the innovators innovate *for* and *on behalf of* them.

It is this context of understanding what users are, and the passive role they are expected to play, that we need to keep in mind when understanding why publicly funded organizations fail to succeed in viral reality marketing campaigns. User-driven innovation is about benefitting from user's input while assuming control and responsibility. This is quite in contrast to the genre of viral stories in which we

have seen that things quickly get out of control, and retain a life of their own, due to the actively participating crowds on the internet.

2.2.2 Users as the source of innovations

As we have just seen, user-driven innovation within the public sector in Denmark (and many other areas as well) deals with a promise of better product development. It emphasizes a strategic approach, presenting the users as a **resource** valuable to innovators and producers. This approach acknowledges users' important role in the development process. Since the product is developed *for* users while including them in the early stage of development, there is a great promise for innovation. There is, however, a second perspective on user-driven innovation I would like to bring forward. Here the product is developed *by* the user. This approach deals with the concept of innovation as something that emerges from networks of users who customize products and exchange ideas and tools, thereby enabling more users to innovate for their own benefit. This perspective represents a different take on innovation and hence the role of users. It ascribes power to users, using democratization as a core concept. Thus, users are the **source** from where innovations emerge. User-driven innovation is a phenomenon, as opposed to the previous perspective where including users was to be considered a method. Consequently, the role ascribed to users is different: They are not used by anyone else, instead they are the focus since they are the driving force of innovations.

When going back to the literature, users have played a role during innovation of products since at least Adam Smith (Smith 1759; Bogers, Afuah, and Bastian 2010). The user and his or her motivations were portrayed as an important driving force, but it was not up until the sixties that users as a category was considered of importance to the product development process. An early research stream, portrays users' important, however peripheral, role in providing producers with inputs (Burns and Stalker 1961; Myers and Marquis 1969; Rothwell 1977). Later research, with Eric von Hippel as one of the pioneers, has gone even further, by arguing that users can be the prime source of innovations. The users themselves, can be innovators, not just a resource to the producers who innovate (Hippel 1988). Since then, research on users as innovators has extended to areas as diverse as industry dynamics, entrepreneurship, firm boundaries measurement, and policy (Hippel 2005; Shah and Tripsas 2007). Today a variety of studies position the user as their primary focus, acknowledging their active role as innovators.

Hippel refers to the concept of user-driven innovation in a variety of settings. Other studies could have been included as well, but most of them resort to a specific innovation, whereas Hippel is

concerned with the general role of users. Hippel has developed a framework for understanding the phenomenon itself, independent of the specific empirical setting in which it is located. The keywords in Hippel's approach are "freely", "democratization" and "horizontal networks".

Hippel's approach firstly emphasizes a distinction between innovation users and innovation manufacturers. Users are those who expect to benefit from *using* a product or service. They are unique in that they alone benefit directly from innovations, all others must *sell* innovation related products or services to users in order to profit from innovations (Hippel 2007:3). This distinction does not separate people as either users or manufacturers; the determining factor is what kind of benefit they expect from their actions. For instance, we might see Boeing as a manufacturer of airplanes, while it is also a user of machine tools. If we are interested in innovations developed by Boeing for the airplanes it sells, then Boeing can be considered a manufacturer innovator. If, instead, we are interested in metal-forming machinery developed by Boeing for in-house use when constructing their airplanes, we can characterize them as user innovators. It depends on the innovation we want to focus on and what kinds of benefits someone gets from them, whether they are considered users or manufacturers. Hippel's focus lies with the user innovators, emphasizing that the innovations worth paying attention to are in their hands, and emerge from them. He points to a recent development, and to a new trend towards democratization since users are increasingly able to innovate for themselves. He argues that the reason for this, should be found in technologies enabling easy share-ability and exchange of information. (Hippel 2005:121ff). Users can develop what they want, instead of relying on manufactures to create something that corresponds with their local needs (Hippel 2005:54ff). To emphasize this trend, he suggests the concept of networks by which he means:

> *"[N]odes interconnected by information transfer links which involves face-to-face, electronic or any other form of communication" (Hippel 2007:3).*

What is characteristic for these user innovation networks is that they are horizontal.

> *"It is our contention that completely fully-functional innovation networks can be built up horizontally – with actors consisting only of innovation users" (Hippel 2007:3).*

The horizontal user innovation networks have a great advantage over the manufacturer-centric innovation development systems, which have been the mainstay of commerce for hundreds of years. Without the restriction of the available marketplace or dependence on a specific manufacturer to act as its (often very imperfect) agent, networks of users can develop exactly what they want. The

horizontal adjective indicates that there is no hierarchy, but instead a flat structure in which whoever wants to innovate can do so, since resources are available to all.

Hippel's approach, in contrast to the Danish government's use of user-driven innovation sees users as the source, not as anyone else's resource. However innovation users can be used as a resource: According to Borges et al we need to work with two definitions; users as *postimplementation adapters,* and users as *sources of innovation-related knowledge* (Bogers, Afuah, and Bastian 2010:865). The research in this area deals with how producers can take advantage of users' ability to innovate by helping them in providing tools for further innovations. Examples mentioned here are car producers who provide additional accessories to facilitate users in their innovations within the scope of the producer's original innovations. Such accessories would be sunroofs, stereos, larger tires and so on. These studies operate along the same conceptualizations as we shall later see used by Rogers and Charters & Pellegrin (Charters and Pellegrin 1973; Rogers 2003). They operate with two categories, which they analytically separate: the original as the innovation, and the customized versions as re-inventions. Thus, studies that focus on post-implementation adaptation insist on analytically separating the original innovation from the reinventions made by users after implementation. They suggest that in the first place there must be an innovation, which the users reinvent adapt and modify. Studies that operate with users as post-implementation adapters, argue that users play an important role in the innovation process, but only *after* a technology is implemented (Leonard-Barton 1992; Hippel and Tyre 1995).

Other strands of literature have turned their focus to users as sources of innovation-related knowledge. Three such concepts are Consumer-Active Paradigm, Lead users and Co-creation. Hippel developed the concept of Customer-Active Paradigm (as opposed to Manufacturer-Active Paradigm) (Hippel 1978), which is when users take initiative to bring their innovations to producers. There have also been attempts to extend this user view for example by integrating the user's entrepreneurial role and thus commercial diffusion of innovation (Foxall and Tierney 1984). Another suggestion as to how producers can take advantage of users' ability to innovate is presented through the concept of lead users. This involves locating users on the leading edges of the target market as well as users from other markets that face similar problems, in an extreme form (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2003; Vargo and Lusch 2004). Involving lead users is often followed by an assumption that, once found, they will reveal the needs that others will have in months or even years.

A third way in which literature has dealt with user innovations is concerned with co-creation, for instance through activities such as hosting user communities (Jeppesen and Frederiksen 2006) or providing toolkits for innovations (Hippel and Katz 2002). Here several studies have found that the internet as facilitator has been an important source (Piller and Walcher 2006; Verona, Prandelli, and Sawhney 2005). However, co-creation implies that in some sense there is collaboration between users and producers. Co-creation is problematic when it comes to viral reality marketing since this assumes a collaboration which is not visible from both sides in the beginning (only the producers know for sure), and, as we shall see, leaves challenges in cases where people feel deceived when learning that their participation was part of an advertising strategy.

Even though a focus on manufacturers' benefits from users who innovate has been mentioned, what is required to understand viral reality marketing is neither the Consumer-Active Paradigm, since it is initiated by companies in the first place, nor lead users as these are difficult to predict from case to case. Post-implementation deals with a relatively fixed object where users can modify their *own* version. However, similarly to innovation, it is a concept which is difficult to pinpoint. The manufacturer's innovation is the means which allows the user to innovate. The innovation for the manufacturer is not the same as for the user.

2.2.3 Summing up

User-driven innovation reminds us that there are two ways of approaching the relationship between users, driving forces and innovations: It can be both a phenomenon, and an instrumental use of that phenomenon. Both are worth holding on to. On one hand persuading people to engage and create awareness is a method, practiced by companies, advertisers, and ad agencies. On the other, as we have seen with empirical examples in the first chapter, their method involves entering an already established genre of exchanges where references are continuously used to in- and exclude groups of people.

In viral marketing the innovation, in the sense of bringing previously unrelated things together, happens even before any potential company tries to benefit from it. Comedians, Youtubers, and journalists already participate either in providing entertaining interpretations or in playing detectives who try their best to inform their readers from putting bits and pieces of information together. Here we have active innovators who make references and content as it fits with their interests and professions.

But we also have companies who try to take advantage of these active reference makings, by deliberately adding content that conspicuously invites spoofs, as well as new interpretations. We need to understand the methods used by those who want to target others, but we also need to understand the practices in which such ads enter, their norms, rules, and challenge. This involves following unforeseen paths, paying attention to unexpected connections that turn discussions and content upside down, thereby following traces as they are on the move and are subjected to changes, alterations, and modifications. Therefore, we need to include both the phenomenon of people who innovate freely in the sense that they bring previously unrelated things together, as well as those who take advantage of this, like VisitDenmark and Danish Road Safety Council, who try to use users as a resource in creating a particular awareness. The relation between the two approaches to users and their role in innovation processes needs further exploration. We need to go beyond considering users as either a resource or the source, and instead look at how they are both. We need to look at how the innovation is something that is a product of the manufacturers and the users simultaneously.

2.3 Diffusion versus translation

User-driven innovation studies allow us to question the relationship between different types of user roles. In particular, the concept of diffusion, a classic approach in both communication and innovation studies, is discussed in comparison with that of translation, which is a direct response to and critique of the former. By juxtaposing and comparing these two concepts I will provide new insights and alternative ways of conceptualizing the interrelations between users, innovations, and driving forces.

2.3.1 Diffusion

As mentioned earlier the two-step flow model, that has formed a basis for many WoM studies, has been subjected to criticism for its simplicity. One critic is Everett Rogers who argues that we need to be more nuanced than the initial two-step flow model. Adaptation is a process consisting of several steps in which the adopters get convinced. We need to focus on the individual and his or her decision-making, and we need to see it as a process. Thus, adaptation comes from a series of decisions.

Rogers has developed and refined the diffusion model through many years. He has gathered data and theories from innovation studies, and from various research traditions. Based on this literature, as well as several of his own studies of innovations, his book Diffusion of Innovation (Rogers 2003) presents a model for diffusion that has been revised according to new studies. The book was first published in 1962 and is now in its fifth edition (2003). Rogers is not interested in how innovations come about, but instead in the process of adaptation. Each innovation starts with early adopters, who

are likely to try out innovations while they are new and not yet mainstream, growing until reaching a critical mass, and fading out with only the late adopters left interested towards the end. As in the studies of Word of Mouth, he focuses on single instances in which a potential adopter makes up his or her mind and develops an attitude towards a product. There is a range of stages the user goes through to make up his or her mind on whether to adopt an innovation or not. In contrast to the original two-step model, Rogers introduces a model that focuses on 5 stages in the innovation decision process: Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation and Confirmation.

Knowledge In this first stage the individual is exposed to an innovation but lacks information about it. However, despite starting with the knowledge stage, there is something going on even before it starts. For instance, *"a Californian could walk past a house with a satellite dish on the roof top and not "see" the innovation"* or *"a farmer could drive past a hundred miles of hybrid corn in Iowa and not "see" the invention"* (Rogers 2003:171), the corn being an invention Rogers has analyzed earlier in his book (Rogers 2003:31). Thus, even though the model starts with the stage in which an innovation has come to the attention of a potential adopter, the innovation already existed before that, independent of whether potential adopters had discovered it or not. There is no guarantee that everyone will. Many people, mostly those with high education or higher social status, are among the first to be *aware* of new innovations. Yet knowing about an innovation is quite different from deciding to use it. Furthermore, it is implicit, that in any given analysis of an innovation, it exists, and becomes subject to studies, independently of whether potential adopters have recognized it as an innovation.

Persuasion is the stage in the innovation-decision process where the individual forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the innovation. In this stage the individual is interested in the innovation and actively seeks information about it. Here, individuals turn to other people, to peers, to confirm their initial beliefs about the innovation. However, a change of attitude is not enough. Since people might make it to the first stage, in having knowledge about an innovation, they might also be persuaded when it comes to a change in attitude. Still, this does not necessarily lead the to practice. Roger refers to such inconsistencies between **k**nowledge, **a**ttitude, and **p**ractice as the KAP-gap (Rogers 2003:176). Such gaps are often seen in innovations related to health innovations where people agree to the problem that the innovation promised to solve, but still do not, chose to adopt the innovation. As an example, Rogers mentions that many people agree, that tools to help them quit smoking are of great value, but that they might, despite agreeing, not want to stop.

Decision In this stage the individual takes the concept of the innovation and weighs the advantages up against disadvantages. They decide whether to adopt or reject the innovation. However, the sequence of knowledge, persuasion, and decision, might not always be the same. Sometimes people make decisions before developing an attitude. To illustrate this, Rogers provides an example of a group of women in a Korean village who were called to a meeting about an innovation: the intrauterine device (IUD). Right after the presentation of the innovation, the women were asked to put up their hands if they wanted to adopt. Eighteen women did so. The reader is not informed how many of the women were attending the meeting, but the story continues telling how they all *"promptly marched off to a nearby clinic to have an IUDs inserted"* which leads Rogers to the conclusion that *"in this case a presumably optional innovation-decision became almost a collective innovation–decision as a result of group pressure"* (Rogers 2003:178). The example is then used to illustrate how the women must have made the decision to adopt, before getting to the stage of persuasion where attitudes are developed. It is meant as an example of how the decision-making stages always comes, but not necessarily in the same chronological order that the model presents.

Implementation In this stage, the individual employs the innovation to a varying degree depending on the situation. The individual determines the usefulness of the innovation and may search for further information about it. Up until this stage, rejection has been an option in each of the stages. One can for instance reject an innovation in the knowledge stage by simply forgetting about it, or in the decision stage by deciding that there are too many disadvantages. However, a new type of reaction, which does not fall under neither the category of rejection nor adopting, comes into the picture here: that of people adopting in a way that *changes* the innovation into something dissimilar to the original innovation.

In the early years of diffusion study, adoption of an innovation meant the exact copying or imitation of how the innovation had been used previously by early adopters. But in 1972 two scholars W.W. Jr Charters and Roland S. Pellegrin discovered that innovations might not be quite the same for all adopters. In their study, of differentiated staffing, the phenomenon they studied across several sites turned out to be diffused in several schools. Yet, for the teachers and administrators, differentiated staffing was interpreted as many different things. Charters and Pellegrin (Charters and Pellegrin 1973) noted the degree to which an innovation was shaped differently in the four organizations they studied. According to Rogers, even though they did not use the term re-invention, this is what the variations in interpretations are about (Rogers 2003:180). They concluded that innovation should not be

implemented from the outside but invented from the inside. Thus, besides rejecting or adopting an innovation, re-invention is introduced as a concept, to cover the situations in which the innovation is adopted, but in a way that does not correspond with the definition of the original innovation.

Confirmation Although the name of this stage may be misleading, the individual finalizes their decision to continue using the innovation and may use it to its fullest potential.

Innovation in relation to diffusion

Whereas Rogers model is introduced since it deals with innovation as a process (which WoM studies do not), the diffusion model portrays innovation as something that is already given. It is assumed to be successful no matter how the individuals respond. Everett Rogers' model of diffusion is considered a classic to innovation studies. Rogers' framework offers a conceptualization of innovation decision-making as a process that has a clear point of view from where to approach the innovations. It starts with the innovation and from there, inquiries are made into who and how people come to adopt. However, we can ask who has the privilege to define what an innovation is. The model enables the analyst to do so. It requires that the researcher defines or locates the boundaries of the innovation before he or she starts exploring the decision-making process. This approach fixes the innovation and ensures that it is already fixed from the beginning of any study. This leaves little room for innovations that are made up to be altered and modified.

Consequently, the innovation is fixed and stays fixed. It exists as such even before it meets the users. The driving force lies in the character of the innovation, while the role ascribed to the users is about whether they recognize the innovation or not. It is the process the user goes through in the decision-making process that diffusion puts into focus, whereas the innovation is analytically unquestioned and assumed to be the same. This excludes from the very beginning those who take it elsewhere or ascribe new meanings to it that were not intended or considered part of the innovation in the first place. Thus, when using the diffusion model as an analytical tool, we miss out the interesting shifts and turns of events that are very typical for viral reality marketing campaigns since that which spreads constantly is subjected to modifications and alterations.

The concept of reinvention has been discussed by Rogers as well as others (Rice and Rogers 1980) as an attempt to take into account and develop a typology for an innovation that diverges from what was originally the innovation. However, there is a larger analytical step to be taken, if we want to focus more specifically on the temporary open-ended and messy data that arises, as alterations and modifications are directly encouraged. In viral reality marketing, the message is often deliberately

made ambiguous and open to various interpretations. Here, variations are crucial to understand the development of campaigns.

When focusing on innovation, users, and driving forces, as concepts, it becomes clear that something is missing. Whereas in viral reality marketing the content shared is deliberately changed from iteration to iteration, the diffusion model explains that which is shared as the same, and as unaltered. Should things deviate from what they originally were, another concept, reinvention, is introduced instead, to analytically distinguish the original from variations (James G. Emshoff et al. 2013; Blakely et al. 1987; Kelly et al. 2000) Using the diffusion model will allow us to fix an innovation, a story, or a message as the same, but will not allow for the nuances of its multiple versions.

2.3.2 Translation

Actor-network theory (ANT) is introduced as a counter proposal to the diffusion model. The translation model is a direct response to the diffusion model. After having discussed the translation model specifically, I will provide a more general description of the framework of ANT and emphasize its value in making visible the interplay between humans and non-humans. This will be used as a theoretical basis from where to approach empirical data in chapter three.

Bruno Latour directly criticized Rogers model of diffusion. To make his point, Latour suggests exchanging the diffusion model with a model of translation. He explains the difference by comparing the innovation with a token:

> *"[In the diffusion model] The displacement of a token through time and space does not have to be explained. What is in need of an explanation is the slowing down or the acceleration of the token which result from the action or reaction of other people." (Latour 1986:266).*

In the translation model the focus is different:

> *"Instead of the transmission of the same tokens - simply deflected or slowed down by friction- you get in the second model, the continuous transformation of the token." (Latour 1986:268).*

Whereas the diffusion model attributes the objects that travel certain inertia, the translation model does not as such focus on the object but on the several interactions that affect its transformation.

> *"[In the translation model]There is no inertia to account for the token […] Displacement is not caused by the initial impetus whatsoever; rather it is the*

> *consequence of the energy given to the token by everyone in the chain who does something with it." (Latour 1986:267).*

To elaborate on the difference between the two tokens, he explains how the latter can be understood as a ball in a rugby game. There are, of course common objectives for the different players, although half want the ball in one goal, while the other half want it in the other goal. However, despite half the players aiming for the same result, the ball's route is not predetermined. Each time the ball changes hands, the new player tries to reach his or her goal with his or her own strategies, plans and expectations. The success criteria are manifold and can be measured from different points, while the diffusion model only allows for a single measuring of either success or failure. This analogy works on an intuitive level only. Should one follow it more strictly, one could still argue that there are two points from where to measure success; that of goals scored by one team against the other. Yet the point remains, that no action is given. Various unpredictable factors threaten to change the outcome. These are what Latour wants to emphasize.

Latour uses the metaphor of translation to introduce the concepts of facts and fact-builders. Drawing a parallel between the game and the academic production of statements, he emphasizes that the fate of any statement depends on the behavior of others. A researcher may have written the definitive paper proving that earth is hollow and that the moon is made of green cheese, but this paper will not become definitive if others do not take it up and use it as a matter of fact later:

> *"You need them to make your paper a decisive one, if they laugh at you, if they are indifferent, if they shrug it off, that is the end of your paper. A statement is thus always in jeopardy, much like the ball in a game of rugby. If no player takes it up, it simply sits on the grass." (Latour 1988).*

Thus, the total movement of a ball, a statement, or generally any artifact, depends on action, not on one fact-builder, or player, but to a much greater extent on that of a crowd over which the fact-builder, player, or ball, for that matter, has little control.

This point is worth bearing in mind when understanding viral marketing, a phenomenon that, as part of the strategy, relies on others to pick up messages, transform them (in viral reality marketing in particular), and turn them into something that is important and relevant for others. If a producer wants others to take up his or her message, it is necessary for others to act, and make it a decisive one. Yet it is unpredictable how it will play out.

Translation is an outcome caused by various actors aligning themselves, thereby creating networks to stabilize a structure in which actors speak on behalf of each other. Thus, ANT takes no interest in artifacts and those who use it – in themselves. Instead, it is the alliances between actors and the networks by which they are connected that is the focus. For instance, ANT will not speak of a computer, it will be concerned with what keeps it stable. The computer depends on others who consider it a stable object and recognize it as a computer, and it relies on elements such as cables, electricity, motherboard, screen, screws, programs, compilers as well. ANT is not concerned with what any object is, but instead on what new insights emerge from asking how the artifact is kept stable.

Actors and Networks

The most important project for ANT is the removal of a priori assumptions (Latour 2005; Latour 1996a). Instead of entering the field with concepts that need testing in an empirical case, Latour emphasizes the strength in following the actors and where they go in order to map the connections they make. He turns things upside down by not using categories and concepts as explanatory but instead as things in need of explanation. This is reflected in the introduction to his book Reassembling the Social, where he emphasizes:

> *"When social scientists add the adjective "social" to some phenomenon, they designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon." (Latour 2005:1).*

"Social" does not qualify as an explaining element in itself, although it is often used like that. The social is not above the things studied and can therefore not be used as an explanatory factor. The social, as well as nature, technology, and science must be explained and accounted for. These categories do not have precedence (Latour 2006:209). ANT shifts around fore- and background in the sense that universality and order is not the rule, but an exception that has to be accounted for (Latour 2006:210). ANT does not desire to add networks to social studies, but to reassemble social studies by using networks. Its aim is to highlight correlations and associations that otherwise might be invisible. He emphasizes that:

> *" No explanation is stronger or more powerful than providing connections among unrelated elements, or showing how one element holds many others" (Latour 1996a:8).*

The relations, and hence the network, is the key point in using ANT as it highlights relations that many other sociological analyses miss. For instance, taking innovation as something that needs to be

studied, instead of treating it as a passive object around which actors make up their minds and decide whether they want to adopt it.

ANT shifts innovation, for a temporary network of relations of allied actors. It is not the innovation that needs to be explained. Instead, ANT is interested temporary networks of alliances, and in questioning what alliances of actors enable the innovation to gain and maintain its strength. Whereas the diffusion model takes the innovation as starting point, while exploring whether people adopt it or not, ANT sees innovation as an actor that changes others, while traveling, but also as an actor that is changed by others simultaneously.

Non-human actors

Another contribution that is significantly relevant to highlight, is the removal of distinction between humans and non-humans. As discussed earlier, non-human actors such as algorithms, search engines and digital infrastructures defining specific digital platforms, affect users, while at the same time change, due to inputs based on the way they are used by these users. By taking both groups seriously as actors, we can capture how a task can be delegated from one actor to another across these boundaries. For instance, humans, thanks to digital infrastructures, can write one message for hundred people at the same time instead of writing one for each. Thus, the work of duplicating content is performed by the digital infrastructure. The digital infrastructure as an actor can show personalized content specifically for the user, based on a profiling of this user's interests, while the user contributes to the profiling through their actions[xxi]. Therefore, it is important to analytically consider the interplay between humans and various digital actors such as algorithms, scripts, cookies etc.

Latour uses three arguments to emphasize the importance of the interplay between humans and non-humans: If one wants to enter or leave a room, one can start building up walls for making the room, making holes when leaving and repairing the wholes afterwards. This is of course a very naïve way of thinking, but the point made by Latour is to pay specific attention to the work delegated to doors and hinges. Thus, non-humans can take over actions from humans. Latour calls this "distribution of competences" (Latour 2005:230). Work can be done by doors and hinges, but to make sure they close when you leave and open when you enter, this work can be delegated to a groom, and the work done by the groom can be delegated to a hydraulic door closer. When looking at delegations in this way, it does not make sense to make a priori distinctions without paying attention to the work non-human actors do and the work they free humans from doing. In addition, both the human and the non-human

can take over work from the other. Studies that exclude the focus on non-human actors tend to ignore what they do and what they make humans do.

Latour's further emphasizes the moral aspect as an example of how delegations can be distributed between humans and non-humans. A person might act in one way that appears to be morally correct, even though the person is not motivated by moral at all. For instance, a person might not want to use seatbelts in the car, but ends up doing it anyway despite his or her will, since this is the only way to avoid the annoying beeping noise the car makes until the seatbelt is worn (Latour 1992). There is a gap between what the man does and why he does it. Interests are translated as the driver acts in a morally correct way, but his actions might not have anything to do with moral at all. Thus, attention to non-humans may uncover a different story of why a driver acts morally correct. This leads to the next question: where and when does it all start? Often, we tend to trace stories back to humans, by directing the story to begin where the human designed the alarm to make the driver act morally correct.

ANT has a different approach to this. It does not seek beginnings and ends. It emphasizes the continuous work of achieving and maintaining the power of controlling others. It sets focus on the continuous negotiations back and forth between actors, both human and non-human.

The quandary of the fact builder

When it comes to ascribing power, ANT directs its attention to alliances. Power is not an attribute on any actor a priori; It must be achieved. To illustrate this, Latour emphasizes the fact-builder: the actor who wants to make a statement into a fact. For instance, the fact that UDI is good for woman in Korea; that video recordings help to retain the customer's experiences, based on their observed behavior; that building materials communicating with the user is something the user benefits enough from to be willing to pay extra. Who made these inventions? ANT would ask: Which actors *turned* these into innovations? This is where the quandary of the fact-builder becomes relevant. As it concerns the challenges the fact builder faces in translating interests to make others agree that their innovation is in fact an innovation.

The quandary is about whether others are willing to take up the fact builder's statement or not. If not, the statement will be limited to a point in time and space i.e., it stays as dreams or fantasies retained by the fact builder. However, if people take it up, they might transform it beyond recognition. The solution suggested by Latour, is to be able to make others translate their interests to be *in line* with yours, so that their actions and alliances support your fact.

Analogous to reality marketing, we may assume that a viral video does not exist in and of itself. As a video is launched, it is not a viral video. Instead, it may become viral as viewers, algorithms, hashtags, and links all take up the video and facilitate the continuous growth of it. Likewise, each of these actors may transform it: A hashtag may juxtapose the video with other videos thereby creating similarities between entertainment and politically potent issues. Other brands may attempt to convert the attention to their own products, or the viewers of the video may simply find is uninteresting and therefore not share it. The brand using viral reality marketing, therefore does not make a viral video, they produce a video with a potential for becoming viral, while relying on others to make it so. Who or what then transforms a video into a viral video?

Latour provides an example to clarify this (Latour 1988b); Rudolf Christian Karl Diesel, a German inventor, invented the diesel engine that we know today! Or, asks Latour, did he? In his analysis he unravels the history of the engine, how in came into being, and what made it into what we know as the diesel engine today. He starts with the patent Diesel made to secure his invention. Diesel, along with the patent for the engine alone, did not *have* an engine, Latour argues. For it to become so, he depended on others. For instance, someone came along with a device that depicted, on a simple indicator cylinder card, how pressure changes with changing volume, as the piston moves inside the cylinder, so that the area on the diagram measures and makes the work done visible. Since this made it easier for others to see graphically how his engine was better, Diesel jumped right at it. Thus, Latour would say, Diesel lent his force to its inventor. MAN Engines later lent their engineers to Diesel with the assumption that after a few years, they would be able to resume their usual business of manufacturing engines, only on a larger scale. With this example Latour argues that both Diesel and MAN took detours to reach the goals they wanted. "*Sometimes fact builders are going to do away with explicit interests so as to increase their margin of maneuver"* (Latour 1988a: 114). Latour's story of Diesel and the engine illustrate how it is necessary, but at the same time risky, to involve others. This calls for new ways of telling the story of how and when an innovation becomes an innovation.

Like the story of Diesel and MAN, VisitDenmark, and all advertisers lent their forces to others who decided whether to share or not. Indeed, they encouraged them to fill in gaps and tell stories about what it might really be about. Therefore, it is highly relevant to look more into the quandary of wanting to have a fact established i.e., having a particular awareness created, while lending forces to others and relying on them to make it become so. Latour's approach enables a shift in focus not only on an innovation as a fixed thing, but to ask instead what stabilizes and threatens it. This shift is

interesting, and the questions it allows us to raise reach further than only those who share. In creating an analytical symmetry for actors without distinguishing between human and non-human actors, it also helps us ask: What role do digital infrastructures, scripts, algorithms, password protected profiles etc. play? I will get back to the role of these non-human actors. For now, I just want to keep them in mind while presenting the types of translation Latour describes because this group of actors is included here.

In the analysis Latour uses five examples of what translation can look like. Whereas four are about making others support and strengthen your fact, the fifth is about how to make their behavior predictable: How to keep the interested groups in line. This last task is by far the most difficult one.

The **first** type of translation can be summarized as "*I want what you want*". Here an actor lends his force to someone else, i.e., the fact builder rides piggyback on others to hold his or her interests in line with them. This rarely happens but it illustrates the option that the fact builder translates his/her/its interests according to others'. The **second** "*I want it why won't you*" might not be likely unless something else is in place. For instance, that the others have their usual way cut off. A classic example used elsewhere by Latour is a speed bump (Latour 1999: 186). If not in terms of direction then in terms of the speed with which they drive, drivers quite literally have their usual way cut off. It does not mean they cannot continue as if nothing had changed, but an additional actor is suddenly included: The car's suspension. Drivers are faced with a choice between slowing down, which is in the interest of the one who put up the speed bump, or risking having their car damaged if they refuse to keep their interests in line with the one who set it up. In the end the driver modifies his behavior through the mediation of the speed bump. This illustrates how non-humans and humans both affect each other. A non-human can affect how the human behaves. The **third** type can be summarized: "*if you make a short detour…*" Sometimes a fact builder cannot reach a goal straight away, he might then either convince others to take a detour "*if you come my way you can reach your goal faster*" or take a detour him/her/it-self to reach the goal eventually. Here an important point comes up: allocating credit, for it is rarely that simple that only one actor will have to take a detour. Actors who have different interests almost always cooperate despite these, with their own goals in mind. Thus, several interests coexist simultaneously. This also causes difficulties in unraveling and pinpointing exactly who should have the credit for an innovation as it has become so. Take for instance the diesel engine and the question of who invented it? Diesel? MAN? Both? The same goes for someone sharing a video with his followers on a social media – he might want to share this, but to do so, he borrows the

forces of specific algorithms that perform the work of making sure followers get to see the video. **Fourthly** and as an extension, Latour mentions reshuffling interests. This can be achieved by displacing goals or inventing new groups. The detour taken by actors to reach their different interests should be rendered invisible. It should feel like a straight line for each of them. Mindjumpers, the ad agency mentioned earlier for replying to the mother seeking her father, might want to make their own story while referring to the VisitDenmark's video, to distance themselves from it. But at the same time, they help the story that VisitDenmark made to become better known. For both VisitDenmark and Mindjumpers, it may feel like a straight line to their own goals of distancing or supporting the story retrospectively. This of course raises the question of multiple simultaneous and even conflicting interests.

The **fifth** type on translation is about becoming indispensable or establishing an obligatory passage point, that people would want to go through. The main point here is that to succeed, other actors will have to be brought in, and, to paraphrase Latour "*most on them do not look like men or women*" (Latour 1988a:121). Recalling the example with the rugby ball, neither of the players' actions makes sense without also analytically including the non-human actors and how they interact with the players. This is the main point in the fifth type of translation: that the actors in need of being considered include a range of non-human actors as well.

Innovation in relation to ANT

Innovation according to ANT is a process that involves many actors who continuously try to enroll interest and control others. It includes non-human actors; it elaborates on the various interests at play simultaneously. It raises the question of who to ascribe the honor to, since not one, but all involved are driving forces. It is not there from the beginning, and it is continuously relying on being kept in place by actors who choose to engage. The quandary and Latour's example with Diesel brings forth another concern: How to tell the story of an innovation retrospectively, when it is not an innovation from the beginning? When does it become so, and at what point can something be considered an innovation? ANT approaches this question by pointing to the continuous vulnerability of innovations as always in-the-making.

Consequently, when using ANT as a tool to map interaction, we face an analytical disregard of the innovation. For just as social, nature, technology and science are concepts that do not exist prior to an analysis, innovation is not a concept in itself. Analytically disregarding the innovation as a preexisting category provides an alternative way of approaching viral reality marketing, which puts

action and relations into focus and concerns how innovations *come into being* through alliances between actors. As viral reality marketing campaigns are designed to gain momentum through actively participating audiences and unexpected turns of events, innovation, as something that is *continuously* created, is relevant to consider.

Madelene Akrich, Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, in joint contribution (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002a; Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002b) bind the concepts of innovation and translation together with the general principles of ANT, in an argument that points to the unpredictability of any innovations due to unexpected alliances. The visibility of the vulnerability is a crucial analytical and methodological achievement of neglecting the concept of innovation.

Akrich et all's starting point is, that often stories of technological innovations are concerned with success or failures. The starting point for such stories is often based on an assumption of the character of the innovation as successful. For instance, many innovation stories begin with an innovation having become a success, followed instantly by the question of what led to this. As a critique of such ways of telling stories Akrich et all introduce the model of interessement, in which they direct attention to the *active* work that actors do to interest others in stabilizing their facts, while the innovation is in-the-making. The model of interessement highlights the fragility of any innovation and directs attention to the continuous uncertainties that "it" undergoes to potentially becoming so.

Akrich et al. take as starting point two analytical aspects: invention and innovation. Invention can be characterized as ideas, projects, plans, or prototypes, - all that occurs prior to the first meeting with the user, whereas the innovation is the first successful commercial transaction or the first positive sanction of the user. Between the two extremes is a fate played out in accordance with a mysterious script. The mysterious script is what they try to demystify, by making what happens in-between visible. Success is not obtained without effort. In contrast to the diffusion model, effort is not ascribed to the designers, but to all involved; that is, human as well as non-human actors. In the diffusion model, innovations become widespread due to their intrinsic properties, in the model of interessement it is its *capacity to create adhesion between numerous allies* (human as well as non-human). In the latter, the fate of an innovation depends on the active participation of all those who have decided to ally themselves. An innovation is something that must be transformed and continuously kept in place. Effort is a continuous requirement. By shifting focus from innovations as having success as an inherent quality to the multitude of dispersed efforts from various actors, we are able to see how a project deemed to be successful by all experts can suddenly flop, and projects which everybody lost

faith in can suddenly get transformed into a commercial success (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002b:188)

> *"An innovation in the making reveals a multiplicity of heterogeneous and often confused decisions made by a large number of different and often conflicting groups, decisions which one is unable to decide a priori as to whether they will be crucial or not." (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002a:191).*

Akrich et al. try to direct the attention away from talking about the success or failure as a starting point, but instead focus on the intermediary actions, and the fragility of an innovation.

> *"Innovation by definition is created by instability, by unpredictability which no method, however refined, will manage to master, [(references Schumpeter 1934; 1939)] and isn't that the whole point in talking about innovations, the possibility of creating something new as Schumpeter writes: the translator, who brings together two universes with distinct logics and horizons, two separate worlds each of which would not know how to survive without the other[16]" (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002a:195).*

This allows us to see focus on the drive of the user in an innovation. Only the users are who or whatever acts or are acted upon independently of whether they are human or non-human. It is the emergent connections between actors that is worth paying attention to. The driving force is that of actors creating alliances.

This specific approach to innovations is particularly relevant in relation to viral reality marketing campaigns, as they are deliberately designed to grow because of other's engagements in filling the gaps. These campaigns contain enticing and controversial content to ensure momentum, and often this content ignites ethical as well as political debates, which reach mainstream media. They are driven by the continuous, active work of reference making from many sites simultaneously.

As campaigns grow through references to other campaigns, memes, and public events, the boundaries of such campaigns are often difficult to define independently of each other. As they are surrounded by great public attention, such campaigns frequently get resuscitated and become reference points for other campaigns, as well as ethical debates even years after they were launched. To exemplify this interrelatedness, a reference was made between VisitDenmark and a marketing stunt from the year before by the artist HuskMitNavn. Five years later it was spoofed by a travel agency, as they made their humoristic "Do it for Mom" and "Do it for Denmark" campaigns (Spies.dk 2016). These ads

[16] Only Schumpeter ascribes the honor for managing this to an entrepreneur, whereas ANT sees it as various actions performed by a multitude of actors.

made 5 years after the VisitDenmark' ad, hinged on a strong reference to the missing humor when VisitDenmark tried to combine sex and tourism. Viral ads can therefore rarely be distinguished as distinct domains since they rely on referencing, spoofing, or mimicking each other. The approach to innovations in-the-making attends to the relations that are made, *as* they are made. It attends to the *continuous* active work of reference making as well as the *fragility* of such campaigns. As this approach is less concerned with providing an explanation and more with making connections visible, the in-the-making perspective provides a specific focus on innovation as an orientation in the present.

Instead of positioning oneself where innovation *has* become a success, as for instance when concluding that something is widely known and used, and then study how it is perceived, Akrich et al suggest a different positioning. It is the innovation in-the-making one should be interested in. This is where things, despite careful planning, can easily be turned upside down.

This way of framing innovation can also be used as a response to the diffusion model and more general concepts of lead users, opinion leaders and first movers. Many studies of diffusion of innovation have taken these as starting points. But when it comes to viral reality marketing, the actors who, in the retrospective analysis, turn out to have had important roles, are often unexpected from the beginning. Companies might expect their controversial content to take unexpected turns, yet which turns and which actors that end up having played a vital role are not known from the beginning. It is important to remember that during fieldwork I had the privilege of following several campaigns before they were revealed to be so. This signals that both in data gathering and in the way we speak for such campaigns retrospectively, things come into existence that were not visible all along. I will return to this issue in a methodological discussion in chapter five. For now, it is sufficient to signal that in viral reality marketing, there is a significant need for taking the unexpected seriously and acknowledging how micro actors can suddenly become macro actors, since it is the very premise of this type of advertising.

Empirical examples of click and likejacking

As we have seen in the discussion of diffusion versus translation, the framework of ANT enables us to approach viral marketing differently. One of the contributions of this dissertation is the insistence on treating both human and non-humans as actors as analytically equal actors in this type of marketing. An example is click- and likejacking. Just as the man put on the seatbelt, even though he did not want to, ANT makes it visible how Facebook users indicate that they like things on Facebook, without even knowing whether they like them or not. They also share things they do not want to share,

and recommend things that, when asked, they do not recommend. Allowing for the non-humans to speak and exploring the role of the algorithms and scripts, as well as the continuous negotiations between humans and non-humans, provide us with an interesting answer to why people do things they do not want to do.

A concrete way to illustrate the relevance of symmetrically paying attention to such non-human actors is found in Facebook viruses that make people do things counter to their will, and express opinions that they do not agree with. In December 2010, the security company "SCIS Security Group" sent out a warning to the Danish users of Facebook informing them about a virus[xxii] on Facebook. A week later, 135.000 Danish users had been contaminated. The virus spread fast[xxiii]. The growth was exponential, as each person who is contaminated automatically informs of his or her connections about it. If they choose to proceed and watch the video, then it even spreads to the person's friends' friends.

I discovered this virus before reading the warning, as I started to see a pattern: several of my friends within a few hours had updates on Facebook informing their friends that they liked a link. The links were not always the same, or at least they appeared to be different, according to the texts that accompanied them. Yet, to me, there were things that indicated that it was a virus. Firstly, the comments were all in English which seemed odd when posted by people who usually never write in English. Secondly, the links were often very sensational and consisted of capital letters and exclamation marks. Thirdly, they came from people from whom I usually do not receive such recommendations, meaning that the content did not fit with what I usually associated with the senders. These signs were clear to me but, judging by the number of people who participated, the signs were not clear to all.

A few examples of what it looked like:

Anna Hansen likes "LOL This girl gets OWNED after a POLICE OFFICER reads her STATUS MESSAGE."

Marie Jensen likes "This man takes a picture of himself EVERYDAY for 8 YEARS!!"

Michael Nielsen likes "The Prom Dress That Got This Girl Suspended From School"

Peter Sørensen likes "This Girl Has An Interesting Way Of Eating A Banana, Check It Out!"

When clicking on these, one is directed to a seemingly blank page that requires a click before continuing[xxiv].

I tried this using a test profile on Facebook that had no friends, since I expected it to be a virus and found it exceedingly embarrassing if *I* were to contaminate my friends. By using a profile without friends and hence without any connections, there was nowhere for the virus to spread to, except my own wall. However, when clicking, it became clear that the page did more than direct me to the video. The page showed a message with a tiny box where I should confirm I was not a robot[xxv]. Clicking on the box, or anywhere else within the picture triggered a script that would try to post a message to your Facebook wall. Technically this is done with an invisible iframe that follows your mouse around — causing you to click on an invisible "share" button no matter where you click. The share button is not at any time visible to those who click, and they will think they clicked on the "I am not a robot" button. In addition to the message posted on the wall, nothing else happened. In this virus, the users did not even get to see the video as promised. In other variations, the user was actually directed to the video and would probably not have noticed right away that the intermediary "share-on-your-wall-step" happened. This is what informants have told me, but it is not what happened to me. The only thing I saw, when trying to click using my test profile, was a message from my browser informing me that a script was blocked. Since the script was blocked, I was not directed to another site. This is important, since here too non-human actors play a role. I am perhaps more paranoid than most people, mainly because I am married to a computer scientist with computer security as his domain of expertise. Consequently, in my browser, I have a plugin that automatically blocks all scripts on pages visited. I must accept scripts manually before allowing them to execute anything [17]. Thus, all *I* see, when clicking on the error page, is an icon saying that content of this page is blocked. The reason to mention this is twofold; firstly, it provides an insight to why I am interested in the background for any such involuntarily postings, and secondly it illustrates that I too enroll a non-human actor, in this case, to cancel out the actions otherwise performed by the script.

This virus encounter made another difference between me and most of my informants visible. Whereas I was extremely interested in these viruses partly because I studied them, and partly because I have a preference for technical solutions, my informants did not care for such details. And whereas,

[17] Almost all webpages use scripts. They are used to support menu bars, to manage links, to ensure the layout is shown properly etc. On trustworthy sites they are no danger, however some pages are used to lure people to visit, while scripts redirect the search, install Trojan horses etc.

to me, it was obviously fraud that would have embarrassed me, should I be seen to fall for such scams, most of my informants did not think too much about it. They just got disappointed if no video was provided. They were at best slightly annoyed by not being able to see the video they had been curious to see. And what came even more as a surprise to me: often people did not even delete the messages with video recommendations that were automatically posted on their walls.

Another phenomenon I encountered is called likejacking. Here, the user is required to do something actively to be able to see the video. Sometimes they must like the video, like the page featuring the video, or fill out a survey, to be able to access it. In these cases, the user makes an active decision concerning the payoff between liking the unknown and making it known. Yet, they might not consider, that as they like the video *before* seeing it. The "like" is instantaneously passed on as a recommendation to everyone in their network. In this case there is no hidden script. This variation is used when companies want to gather information about a large group of people that they do not believe would voluntarily fill out surveys. Demographic statistic information about the people liking pages, becomes accessible to the page administrator. This information has value if someone wants to direct products to specific target groups. If a like is not taken back (by clicking "unlike"), those who like a page continue receiving updates from the page. This can be used to disseminate advertising.

Click- and likejacking are examples of viral marketing in the sense that a product or message is spread virally through fast-growing networks that continuously get bigger and bigger. In ANT terms, actors take a detour, thereby helping a product to be spread in exchange for users' access to content. The user does not directly want to share recommendations of videos that have the purpose of self-spreading. Yet this is what they indirectly accept. From one perspective we can argue that in cases of click- and likejacking, people voluntarily share links to their friends. From another perspective, the term voluntarily becomes problematic, since it is not the sharing that is the intent of those who click. A displacement of interests happens. Facebook users' desire for watching a video that their friends recommended, gets translated into their own recommendation.

To better understand such characteristics of these viruses, we must pay attention to the work carried out by non-human actors as well the mutual effects human and non-human actors have on each other. If not, there is simply no way of answering why people tell their friend that they like things, they (at that time) do not even know if they like. Neither do we have answers for why people allow someone they do not even know to post messages on their wall informing their friends that they want to share a video. Furthermore, algorithms and scripts are enrolled and mobilized to speak on behalf of friends

as they recommend content. The script and Facebook's algorithm ensuring that your friends are informed of what you like becomes an obligatory passage point for a person who wants to receive payment from a company in exchange for persuading people to provide demographic information and fill out surveys. It is interesting that so many Facebook users agree to take a detour around the click as an obligatory passage point, but if we do not take the non-human actors and the work they do seriously, if we do not focus on the displacements of interests and intermediaries that hold all these actors together in ensuring surveys, what these people are participating in simply makes no sense.

Paying attention to non-human actors can help us understand why people do things they do not want to do, due to a non-human actor, which translates and sometimes distorts actions. This puts an emphasis on how engaging with another actor can be analytically separated from whether this is what the actor wants in the classic understanding. Classic analysis might conclude that the user clicks "like", knowing full well that he does not yet know whether he or she likes it. It is a payoff. But not all actions are performed with consent, and not all other actions are visible to those engaging with them. Scripts and algorithms perform work that is not deliberately hidden, but still performed silently in the background.

Analytically *not* needing to make a difference of whether the user likes a video or hits the like buttons for other reasons, allows us to explicitly illustrate how the like button performs work, changes meanings, and distorts messages.

To translate is both about making equivalent, and about shifting. For two to become one – for an interest to become translated – there is a gap. For two actors agreeing to ally themselves is not just about agreeing (Callon 1986). Sometimes it is about the one temporarily lending its forces to another, sometimes it requires taking a short detour.

The examples of click- and likejacking are useful to illustrate the complexity at play in viral marketing. Focusing on the actors, and on the translations and distortions that take place is useful in understanding how simple everyday tasks on social media such clicking and liking while watching and sharing videos, can be much more than the choices of humans alone. Earlier I promised that I would be able to explain why people indicate that they like something even though this is not true, as well as allowing others they do not know, to post things they are not in control of, on their profiles. The answer to this is to be found by paying attention to the non-human actors as well as the constant

delegation of work between human and non-human actors. The strength of viruses is to be found in the interplay between human and non-human actors.

2.3.4 New ways of approaching users, innovations and driving forces

So far in this chapter, we have seen two opposing discussions of users as well as two analytical approaches to innovation. In the discussion on user-driven innovation, I have discussed portraying users as a resource for others who innovate, as well as the source of innovation. Empirically viral reality marketing places us somewhere between each of the strands. When it comes to viral reality marketing, there is both a company that wants to use users (potential targets) as a resource in spreading a particular message, yet it does so in a style and environment where the users are not seeing themselves as such. They are part of an already existing genre of exchanges and references where the individual's ability to bring new things together becomes the source of their own innovations. We do not need to choose perspectives on users as either resource or source. Instead, we need to be aware that they are both, and that this challenges how we speak of both those who want to create awareness of brands and those who just want to have fun, while also being the targets. Therefore, we need to approach the ambiguities between users as sources of new content while at the same time as resources for specific brands. This double role makes it empirically challenging to tackle users, particularly when they do not consider themselves part of a double role, as they contribute while neither being aware nor caring for what they contribute to in addition to their own interests. The contributions performed as acts of resistance also need analytical attention, for these alliances may at the same time contribute to the growth of campaigns and yet also to the distortion of them.

In relation to innovations, we have discussed how Rogers analytically fixed the innovation by considering it as preexisting independently to how people change their attitudes towards it. This way of conceptualizing innovation has been contrasted to ANT, which disregards it as an a priori concept. Innovation has no meaning in itself. Innovations always only exist temporarily as an innovations-in-the-making. In both cases the innovation is not of particular interest. In Rogers model it is there and need no further emphasis, in ANT it is never there; it is always only a fragile and temporarily existing actor.

Empirically however, viral reality marketing challenges how to talk about what is holding the campaign together. It may not be a preexisting story or video, but something that comes out of the connections that people make by referencing other content. But assuming that it is only always fragile also misses out of crucial aspects of viral reality marketing. For the story shifts from not yet existing,

to potentially being one out of many things, and finally it is also retold retrospectively, as if it was there all along. Therefore, we need other theoretical concepts to grasp the ambiguities of something that holds together a campaign, while deliberately changing radically at the same time.

As stories in viral reality marketing are made deliberately ambiguous, they are designed to shift. Therefore, we need to recall the concepts of shape-shifting moving objects. Objects that shift shape while moving are not only a matter of analytical concern but also of concern for how to construct narrative. There are, from the perspective of the companies behind the campaigns, two phases of viral reality marketing campaigns. The first phase is about sending out ambiguous content that encourages alterations and modifications; in the second phase the companies behind the campaign reveal themselves and try to fix the story, thereby attempting to rewrite history retrospectively. Thus, the story shifts from being ambiguous and encouraging new content, to attempting closure in retrospect. The companies attempt to retell the past by presenting a retrospective explanation that is hopefully so strong that people will accept that it was a campaign all along. This is opposite to the researcher's attempt to retell and account for what has happened. Whereas the analyst tries to *remove* the innovation, the campaign (or the predicate of content being an ad) analytically by being open to informants' various interests, the companies behind viral reality campaigns attempt to *reintroduce* it retrospectively. These two narratives are interesting because they remind us, that both the researcher and the companies behind viral reality campaigns are involved in retelling the story. It also calls for methodological contemplations when it comes to conceptualizing what and when a campaign is, and how to account for it.

In the following chapter I will go into detail about the environments in which viral reality campaigns enter, both when it comes to already existing genres, and to non-human actors. This chapter is a prerequisite for understanding the complexities in gathering fieldwork as well as analytically treating and representing the material retrospectively. Whereas this chapter has been concerned with users, producers, and innovation, the driving force has been less dealt with. The following chapters that introduce empirical data from fieldwork, suggests that ambiguity, conflicts, and incoherence are driving forces that both hold together viral reality marketing campaigns and act a catalyst for their growth.

3. Viral: Genres and technologies

In the final three chapters, we shall go into detail with the study of things that happen suddenly, that are not orchestrated, that are very distributed, networked and highly mediated, as well as the role of potential futures. We shall zoom in on ambiguity as a driving force in making awareness increase. The ambiguous space between fake and real has become a new temporary area that allows for many voices simultaneously.

These chapters take empirical material gathered during fieldwork from 2008 to 2009 as the starting point, and even though viral reality marketing campaigns have become rare, contemporary movements like Me Too and I Can't Breathe, have received global attention, and changed attitudes and actions regarding gender and race. Attention to issues both originates from and depends on manifold, localized contributions to current events. Similarly, crises like Covid-19 also bear these characteristics, with information and misinformation spreading through digitally mediated settings. Even if the object of study, viral reality marketing, has gone out of fashion, paying attention to things that are both global, temporal, fast growing, and subjected to a variety of different, often conflicting, information remains relevant. Movements increasingly gain momentum and grow in digitally mediated settings, harnessing that viral growth strategically, as it is a powerful device to set new agendas and change attitudes on a global scale. The participation enabling such movements both requires and creates ambiguity. Individuals and groups mold the movement to fit their vision, however, that vision may be at conflict with the agendas and interests of other participants of the same movement.

3.1 2008 - 2021

3.1.1 The potential of something big

When studying a phenomenon that is new, there is no way to say whether it will become the pioneer case of something that will be a well-established phenomenon later. While in the field, there is a potential chance that the researcher, in retrospect, is privileged to have been where it all started, just as there is a potential for the researcher to be where something was, that no longer exists. While in the field, these potential outcomes exist simultaneously. I shall return to the importance of this point later, but for now it provides a context for the setting in which I began my fieldwork.

As I did fieldwork, it was with optimism and hope, that this was the new modern communication between government-financed bodies and citizens. The shift from creating awareness of products to spreading information beneficial for society, with the intent of implementing changes in people's behavior in noncommercial ways, sounded both promising and intriguing. Before entering the field, I had a similar case in mind from the Netherlands, where an attempt to create awareness of kidney transplants was concealed as a game show. Three contestants competed to win a kidney from a voluntary donor. The story, however, was staged, and during the grand finale of the show, it was revealed as such. The participants were actual kidney patients, yet they knew from the beginning, that they were part of a controversial stunt to get people's attention and turn it into awareness of organ donation. It was a type of storytelling where people were fooled to get them interested, but assumed willing to forgive it, due to the importance of the real purpose. This specific type of storytelling, and the shift from increasing profit in favor of changing minds and behavior, intrigued me. It seemed like the success of viral marketing -only better- since the purpose was to spread useful information. This was the starting point of my fieldwork.

The potential of this way of reaching citizens, was backed up by a parallel development within the Danish public sector related to an increased focus on actively including users. User-driven innovation had become a buzzword. The public sector in Denmark, from which all three reality marketing campaigns originated, had already undergone radical changes. An increased focus on user-driven innovation had changed the view of citizens from one of passive recipients to actively contributing users with valuable inputs. Therefore, involving users in this new communication strategy matched with the general trend towards inviting users to contribute and participate.

As I was following this new development, while in the field, it seemed highly that this could be the first of many such campaigns, in which information reached the citizens in the name of socially useful information. However, the potential for a promising new future is just that, a potential. And here is the important achievement from glancing back at these cases from 2021. A study holding the potential for becoming the next new big thing, is a present in which a potential future exists.

In retrospect, I can conclude, that this future never materialized. Viral reality marketing is a type of advertising that is no longer commonly used in Denmark to reach citizens, and only to a limited extent to brand products outside the movie trailer domain.

3.1.2 Embracing ambiguity

The viral reality campaigns I followed during fieldwork resulted in extraordinarily strong reactions from some of the people lured into participating without knowing that they were participating in campaigns. Such reactions are less likely to be seen today. Concrete examples of how it is perceived differently can be seen in the changed approach to extreme stories. In 2013 and after most Danish news media featured "what's viral this week" posts. (Politiken.dk 2014; Danmarks Radio 2013; Mediawatch.dk 2015)

In 2021 they are actively used as entertainment, but they have been moved from the websites of news sites to their Facebook pages. Journalists often pose questions to the reader, as to whether they think it is real or fake, and most news media feature a comment section below their published stories, where they frequently encourage their readers to contribute with their theories regarding mysterious unconfirmed stories. Thus, the Danish news media have changed. Journalists have turned controversial and unconfirmed stories into an advantage, as content produced by others, fake or real, is converted into regular news that invites readers to be cowriters in a joint venture to get to unravel suspicious stories.

That the news media have taken up such stories as part of their news stream, does not make it clearer to people whether to expect something to be real or not; instead, it allows for discussions of it. This means that there is a greater tolerance when it comes to such stories today. More people expect that it could potentially be either fake or real, without the need to decide immediately which it is. The mysteries, and the ambiguous outcome of news are seen through sections like "Weekly viral", "This week's mystery", or "Judge for yourself".

To understand why staged stories are difficult to separate from true stories, we need to understand that these stories are one out of many ways in which controversial content is used to get people's attention. The user is constantly faced with various types of storytelling from people with various agendas.

Controversial content is also generated to lure people to specific sites. When sites have a lot of traffic, domain owners can sell advertising space for companies at a higher price with reference to high exposure. Even though the stories are obviously staged, they serve only to entice people to visit the site, not share the content. These sites may place cookies in the visitor's browser to track and make demographic profiling, to harvest information that has value for brands to target their audience better.

There are staged stories, which are made for the entertainment alone such as satire. These sites often provide clues, and the content is carefully crafted, to reward those familiar with the genre. Yet, often people share without paying attention to sources, and therefore easily mistake staged satire stories for true ones, and hence satire may be shared as facts. Many share contents without paying too much attention. There is also a growing trend to keep trying to fool others *into* believing staged stories, and thus turning fooled people into objects of entertainment. Satire actively used to expose those who do not know enough to spot what they are dealing with, is about in- and excluding people. The Onion is a well-known and well-established fake news site that provides satire news, yet people who do not know it, or do not recognize the small clues that reveal it to be satire, are fooled into believing it. There are even sites exposing such people. This excerpt is from literallyunbelievable.org, where people who by accident, or due to lack of knowledge, take The Onion seriously, and are exposed for it[xxvi].

In June 2014, *The Onion* launched a sub-site shifting from creating fake news to creating fake virals. It is a site that posts the videos, tests, and games that usually go viral, while mocking them. They do so by mimicking the genres of viral content. To mention a few examples that very well captured the genres of many articles and quizzes that go viral in 2015: "*8 Things No Guy Over 25 Should Have In His Apartment*" or "*Which 'Girls' Character Are You?"* (Clickhole 2015b; Clickhole 2015a). The first characterizes a genre of lists of things you should be doing before you reach a certain age, get married, buy a house etc. Such lists go viral still to this day. The capital letters in the headline also indicate a correlation to content going viral. It characterizes a specific sensational style of writing often used in Facebook virals. Games like "Which character are you", have been made in thousands of versions, and often comes in the shape of quizzes that are made to gather demographic data and survey answers from the participants. As output, participants can post on their wall which of the characters, they are most likely to be, according to their replies. It is these well recognized genres of viral content that Clickhole makes fun of. This means that readers of Clickhole will have to possess a certain knowledge and experience to appreciate the satire and recognize that Clickhole's content is fun because it is *not* fun.

Comedy between fiction and facts

In the television entertainment industry, the in-between of fiction, and facts has become an established genre as well. Louise Brix Jacobsen introduces the concept "Fiktiobiografism" an amalgamation of fiction and biography pinpointing a broader international trend where public persons play themselves. (Brix Jacobsen, 2011). To mention a few: The American "Curb your enthusiasm", the German

"Pastewka" and the Norwegian "Hjerte til hjerte". Fiktiobiografism is a new way of narrating. The term covers public figures who play themselves while it is not clear how much is the actual person and how much is fictional.

In Denmark, the trend was first introduced trough the TV series Klovn. It aired between 2005 and 2018 and played a crucial role in challenging the need for determining whether something is fiction, or fact. The series draws on the pictures and stories of the actors, that the audience is already acquainted with through the press, thereby using doubt about whether it is real or rumors, to push limits further. It is a comment on tabloids, and an attempt to further blur the boundaries by using strategic ambiguity. However, such genres require that the audience knows in advance what the press writes about the public figures. This illustrates, that for the genre to become a success, not just any fake story can be included, and not just any viewer will appreciate it.

Fictiobiografism contributes to a genre within entertainment, in which people have become accustomed to appreciating the space *between* fiction and facts, instead of believing it to be one while being disappointed to discover it is the other. Over time viral reality marketing campaigns too have paved the way for a change in attitude and expectations. Stories made up to look like true stories whereas they are actually advertising has become an established and recognized genre. To understand the context in which viral reality marketing played out, it is important to remember that they were pushing the expectations of their audience, since the audience was less likely to expect to move between fiction and facts than comedians. As we shall see in the following chapter, this allowed for several comedians to take advantage of the campaigns and, even, come out of it more successful than the companies did.

Even as the ambiguous space between fake, real, facts, fiction, and satire are appreciated more and strategically used by comedians, journalists, and advertisers today, this was not the case in 2008 and 2009 when I started conducting fieldwork. Today it is expected that people, to a higher extent, interact with content without having to decide. They often appreciate the ride and consider ambiguous stories entertaining more than frustrating. As my campaigns ran, it was primarily comedians and people working with marketing who recognized this genre, appreciated it, and went along for the fun, thereby complicating the discussions further for all those who did not yet recognize the genre. These specific groups of people navigated on purpose in the ambiguous space between real and fake in contrast to most other participants who were not, at that time, familiar with the genres that embrace ambiguity. They did not try to make distinctions and single out content as either true of fake, instead it was the

discord between comedians who recognized the genre and ordinary people who did not, that kept the discussions going.

Embracing ambiguity versus chasing the truth.

A brief example on how people's approach to staged stories has changed, is KIM's chips, a Danish brand that for many years has used a fictional character "Jørgen" for their ads. Recently it was time to make a change. Jørgen was to be replaced with another actor. To make the introduction of a new character interesting, they sent a press release claiming that they had structural challenges in the advertising division. They closed their Facebook page with the announcement that their page was closed due to restructuring[xxvii]. Through videos and updates on their homepage they published a press release and followed up with stories that Jørgen had been violent, and that they managed to get recordings of it as a proof. It was revealed that Jørgen had a son - a son who might take over the business. It was not concluded, only insinuated.

The whole thing was Kim's way to kill off a character with style, and further to get the media's attention. They got it. From going through comments on the now reopened Facebook page, as well as the journalists' continuous updates on the matter, it became clear that no one participating in the discussion, believed it to be true; instead, they played along and discussed what might be the outcome. Years later, Jørgen is still featured by Kim's. Several stories circulate in press releases, fake press releases, Jørgen contemplating press releases, Jørgen announcing he is bankrupt, etc. But what really happened? Did the actor playing Jørgen get sick? Did he plan to be absent? Retire for real? Were there contract issues between the actor and Kim's? Did the marketing division think that the character needed new story development? Was it a test to see if the audience loved Jørgen enough to claim him back? Did they remove him for people to like him more? I do not know the answer. And when it comes to understanding how informants engage with the campaign, it is often neither possible, nor the point, to get to know the truth. Being curious, collating bits and pieces of information is what the stories of Jørgen are made up of.

3.1.3 Navigating in ambiguous territory

Informants and researcher face a mutual challenge when navigating in ambiguous settings. Just as much as I recognize that the campaign is made up for the joy of the ride, when gathering data, I *wanted* to know more, I wanted to be able to tell the reader, what the real story was and measure it up against the creative rumors, to illustrate how this is not visible to those playing along. This was a large and general concern as I gathered data. Often, I asked people responsible for campaigns to tell

me what it really was, or to confirm suspicions. Yet, I was often met with a mysterious smile, and a "what do YOU think?" I was for instance asking serious questions regarding the actor and the production of Kim's campaigns, while I was met with replies from Jørgen in-character. Often, I was reminded that what I considered important information, was not accessible to me. I also had the feeling that things happened elsewhere, and that I was missing out on pieces of the puzzle wherever I went. I experienced how confirming versions of a story as true, mapping the exact timeline, tracing rumors back to where they began, was difficult and often impossible. Answers were almost always surrounded with uncertainty and a need to ask even more questions.

Several things pointed to a tendency to appreciate stories for what they temporarily were, in favor of clarifying and fact checking them: journalists encouraging engagement through generating ambiguous content while laying out the questions to the readers, comedians engaging as an opportunity to provide entertainment. From many different sites, and from various groups of engagers, it was no longer about explaining, but more about advancing on the details that made up another good story. These approaches, from journalists, comedians, and informants who played detectives, bear similarities to the crafting of jokes, in which realism is exchanged for creative, well timed, juxtapositions of a few handpicked elements. One can always go back and decipher a joke, but by then the moment is gone. The joke explained is incommensurable with the joke told or experienced.

Diverse groups of journalists, comedians and people who suggested new potential connections, are all examples of informants who did not try to answer questions and clarify facts but tried to escape them in favor of building upon them. Klovn deliberately used their actor's own characters in an in-between-land, journalists turned unconfirmed stories from failures of journalists that knew too little, to new enticing questions to their readers, and people who played detectives, were approaching stories like entertainment while playing along for the ride. Empirically there tends to be an orientation towards embracing ambiguity instead of deconstructing it. Yet I was faced with a concern for on the one hand attempting to explain what was going on, and on the other hand playing along. I was torn between appreciating the stories, the uncertainties, and the lack of confirmation, and wanting to at least go further than my informants to get to know more. The feeling I had was remarkably similar to deconstructing jokes. Jokes deciphered, explained, and analyzed lose their temporary beauty. I discovered the same when attempting to clarify and chase facts. This difference between going along with my informants and telling the story of what my informants were participating in, turned out to

be an insight, in the process of gathering data and writing about it retrospectively. It made me question whether, and how, it is possible to tell stories that in their character do not want to be told in univocal ways. The storylines of Jørgen and Klovn work because they are not limited to things as either true or fake. Instead, they are positioned in an ambiguous space where both exist simultaneously. I discovered that the frustration faced by not being able to capture it all, was just as much a practical concern for me as it was a premise for my informants whom, just as me, navigated within a cacophony of information.

3.1.4 The field as a temporal reconfiguration

Phenomena that were interesting and new in 2008, have since managed to get names such as newsjacking, spoofing, and brandjacking, illustrating that it is a known phenomenon that some brands take advantage of what others gain awareness about. Here are a few of such categorizations that have emerged in the last decade.

SoMe - Content marketing in social media. This genre of marketing is about creating relevant and valuable content with the intention of changing or enhancing consumer behavior. It represents a new step that marketers, who acknowledge that traditional marketing does not work anymore, have taken to reach their potential customers. Traditional in this context means ways in which people are confronted with advertising without being asked. However, as there have been attempts to force people to see ads without having a choice, so too there have been ways for them to avoid it. Digital video recorders allow viewers to skip ads. Chips in Blu-ray recorders allow viewers to watch blu-rays without the regional restrictions. Ad blockers as plugin in browsers remove advertised content while surfing. Other plugins disconnect surfing from Facebook activity, thus restricting them from learning about the users' behaviors outside the platform, to show directed ads. Alternative search pages[18] allow searching through Google anonymously, without Google learning about search history and pages visited when creating a profile for which ads should be shown.

Social Media (SoMe) and Content marketing is about *not* fighting a battle with customers who have means for winning. Instead, the advertising strategy is to create content that is relevant for consumers. Content that they want to access. This is about communicating with customers and prospects without (directly) selling. Instead of pitching products or services, the marketer delivers information that makes the buyer more intelligent and capable. The essence of this strategy is the belief that if

[18] Startpage.com, Ixquick.com, duckandgo.com, to mention a few of the biggest.

businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they are ultimately rewarded with their loyalty. SoMe and content marketing represent a new way for businesses to think about the relationship between producers and consumers. It follows the viral idea in ideology, by not aiming to control consumers, but instead by providing them with means for helping themselves, for instance by establishing the basis for the consumers to *want* to be helped and supported by the producers and their products. One might say it is about helping consumers, helping producers, helping consumers. In SoMe consumers would not be forced to watch ads, they would be provided with advertised content that is so interesting that the users *want* to share it.

This new focus on relationships is important to bear in mind when thinking of viral reality marketing. Particularly because it was not common to think like this for the companies that I followed in 2008 and 2009. The fact that participants had their own agenda and turned discussions towards other things than the intended message, was perceived as a threat, and a lack of control from those who used this strategy. Most of today's professional viral campaigns do not try to gain control; they celebrate people's participation and accept that twists and alterations are important parts of the game.

Typosquatting is a well-known strategy to lure people into sites they think is one thing but is something else. Sometimes it is made for porn, but often it is made up to look like the page people thought they were visiting. In the beginning of the dissertation, I mentioned the page Threadless.com where users can make and vote for T-shirts to be printed and sold. An example on typosquatting here is Treadless.com. If you write this address you are directed to ww7.treadless, a page with links to design your own t-shirt[xxviii]. Another similar site is ww11.Treadless.com[xxix]. Today the first two are owned by the same company, but it is a well-known strategy to buy domains spelled close to other domains and take advantage of the similarities in names.

Shit storm is a term often used when a single individual is threatened by a large company, a sort of David vs Goliath scenario. Often such scenarios emerge from the individual posting his or her side of the story to a social media, while quickly gaining sympathy from the public. They also emerge from individuals or companies who do something stupid. This often calls for a storm of negative reactions, often out of proportion to what happened. Companies use crisis management to try to control it, individuals often do not have any other options but to wait till the storm settles down.

Love storm is a shit storm with a positive spin. A Danish blogger's attempt to focus on the positive side of the storms, introducing a counter concept (Muriel Mimoun 2014). A love storm is an

exponentially growing attention to a case, product, or person, in which strangers suddenly declare their sympathy or acknowledgement publicly. A recent example is a couple who visited a restaurant with a poor service. The bad service was not caused by the employees, they said, but because there were too few at work compared to the number of guests. They left a $100 tip and a note saying, "*We've both been in your shoes. Paying it forward.*"[xxx] A waiter took a picture of the tip and posted it on Facebook. The picture and the story received over a million shares within a week.

Streisand effect is not a new term, nevertheless, it is included since it describes a phenomenon that from 2008 to 2021 has been more and more present. The term was introduced in 2003. It covers a phenomenon where attempts to hide, remove, or censor a piece of information has the unintended consequence of publicizing the information more widely, usually facilitated by the Internet. It is named after American entertainer Barbra Streisand, who tried to suppress photographs of her residence in Malibu, California by filing a lawsuit. The actual photo had at that time been downloaded from the photographer's website only six times; two of those downloads were by Streisand's attorneys. However, because of the case, public knowledge of the picture increased substantially, and consequently more than 420,000 people visited the site over the following month to see the picture she tries to suppress.

Brandjacking is an activity whereby someone acquires or otherwise assumes the online identity of another entity, for the purposes of acquiring that person's or business's brand equity. It can be difficult to determine whether a brand is brand-jacked or spoofed[19]. Some take advantage of ads that are commonly known to make parodies of them; this is seen as a spoof. Others might make it look like they are actual representatives for a brand, while providing a bad service or a bad representation of it.

Thus, there are names and categories for sorting and interpreting several of the phenomena that I have mentioned so far. In 2021 they are extensively used concepts in the news media. They have become recognized categories and phenomena. But as I did fieldwork, most informants did not know them and did not use them as frames for understanding what was going on.

[19] Spoof is another word for satire, used specifically about brands and ads.

Real time marketing and temporariness

One specific type of brandjacking that I want to bring specific attention to, is real time marketing. This marketing strategy is about making references to things that are happening in real time, as we speak. Some brands have built up a reputation for this type of advertising by linking their brand in creative ways to things as they happen. Real-time marketing requires a local knowledge that is not only tied to geographic, demographics or culture but to time as well. It often makes them difficult to locate and analyze in retrospect since they are part of specific configurations of things. They require awareness about things relevant in a small window of time.

When well executed, they work because they pinpoint what is already on everyone's lips and link these conversations to their brand. This makes a lot of sense in real-time while not so much when removed from its context, i.e., the time when it is published. Take for instance this ad from Carlsberg with the text: "*Carlsberg shows teeth too"*.

Without context it makes little sense. However, positioned in July 2014, and exposed to people who read the news and knew a little about football players, it made perfect sense. During the world Cup in July 2014 a Uruguayan footballer lost his temper and bit an opposing player. This was not the first, nor the second time this player bit other players. The media wrote about the incident because, for some time, it was unclear what consequences it should have. Carlsberg took advantage of the media

attention and references it in their ad. The strategy is to leach on an already existing network held together by a bite. This actor, the bite, might not be strong enough to hold together a network of actors for long, but as long as it does, it constitutes an opportunity for brands to strengthen their position and become part of what is going on.

Another example from the bite-incident was Adidas' poster in South America and Brazil. It encouraged people to post selfies on social media while "getting bit." Adidas had made sure their logo was an inevitable part of the picture and hence was spread while associated with fun.

These examples may be considered global since they spread unhindered by geographical borders on social media, yet they are local in the sense that they make sense only within a specific span of time, just as much as they make sense for a specific group of people who are aware of and interested in football.

Sometimes extremely specific positions are required in order to appreciate specific content. To make sense of the following ad, one would have to know a specific event taking place in Denmark in January 10. 2015: There was a storm and consequently the bridge connecting East and West Denmark was closed. However, Frederik, the Crown Prince of Denmark had official business where he needed to cross the bridge twice during the storm. Both times he managed to get in front of the line of waiting cars and pass the barrier where drivers usually stop to pay. This was for security reasons so that he did not have to wait along with all the others. However, as soon as he had crossed the line, he continued driving. It caused a stir in the Danish media, partly because it took some time to clarify who, if any, had given the permission to drive, and partly because others were offended as the prince could drive when no one else could. For several days, the media tried to unravel why and how this could happen. So did people on various social media. Several brands, experienced with making real

time marketing, took the event as an opportunity for creating entertaining content of course featuring their own brand.

One such example was the beer brand Carlsberg: Their ad said: "*There is a new storm coming up – It's called Frederik, and it's a real media storm*", along with a picture of the bridge, the Tuborg bottle, and a logo.

The ad plays with the ambiguity of the word storm, referring to both the weather and the media storm that were growing increasingly on social media due to the breaking of rules. This requires an additional awareness of another thing that had recently occurred in Denmark. In 2010 Denmark had just begun naming their storms, thus, naming the storm was a time specific reference as well.

Real-time marketing is about temporary, short lived networks of actors that emerge and disappear again. The ads work because people, without explanation, recognize references between the brand and other events. Looking back at such ads later, makes it difficult to see the beauty of these temporary connections, since the network held together by the bite, or the storm, no longer exists. Thus, the network held together by these actors is fragile. It expands, increases, and often disappears again at fast pace. Sometimes one actor can establish itself as an obligatory passage point, while interesting a huge number of other actors. But a continuous effort is needed to keep this actor stable, and particularly with memes, trends on social media, and real time marketing, where the connections are fleeting.

A final example illustrates the temporal aspect while specifically highlighting the role of non-human actors. The prime minister of Denmark Lars Løkke Rasmussen had received a bad reputation for his

activities and appreciation of beer. To take control of his reputation, he created filters on his Facebooks page, so that several words he did not wish to be associated with would be filtered out.[20] Thus, if someone included a word in a public message on his Facebook page, he did not want to be associated with publicly, that message would be visible only to the composer of the content and Lars Løkke Rasmussen. The composer would receive no notice that the message was invisible to anyone else. Therefore, it was difficult for people to notice deletion-work done by the filter. Someone, however, noticed the filter and the list of banned words by looking at the page source.[21] Among other things were the word Fadøl (pint), a connection he did not want to be strengthened more publicly. However, within hours a countless number of people tried to circumvent the filter.

For instance, the filter stops you from writing FADØL, but not:

F

A

D

Ø

L

It stops you from writing the exact word, but not from using other words, such as Fad0l or Fadø1. Pictures containing beer are not filtered either, causing a huge amount of people to add pictures of beer on his page.

A Danish radio station quickly picked up on the news of the list and encouraged their listeners to come up with creative ways to write Fadøl on his page. Several other news sites then wrote about how the station was encouraging its viewers, and then the snowball rolled! This was of course a great opportunity for making real-time marketing, and to whom would it be more obvious than the Danish beer brands.

[20] In practice, if people included such words, a security setting would make sure only the person who wrote it would be able to see it. He or she would not receive any notice of this. It would look as if it appeared on the page, however it was invisible to others.

[21] A page is coded in HTML. By viewing the source, anyone can see more details about what and how content is handled.

Carlsberg was playing with the word lykke (happiness) pronounced the same way: "Ren lykke" means pure happiness whereas “Ren Løkke” means Typically Løkke with reference to the prime minister’s middle name.

Cases like this still occur today. They illustrate how the Streisand effect prevails, as nothing engages the internet as intensely as someone trying to hide something. It illustrates a driving force that is strong, and very present in turning things viral. Whenever someone says “*Shhh*” people start shouting instead. These real time marketing campaigns are great examples of what ANT deals with as micro-actors who become macro-actors. It illustrates how something that seems unimportant, can suddenly be turned into a strong actor that holds together a network of thousands of others, but only when the right actors are mobilized. It also directs attention to the fragility in stories, since they are held together by things that makes sense within a short span of time.

These temporary connections are difficult to maintain for long. Consequently, they are also difficult to locate in retrospect, to those who were not positioned when a storm was just raging over Denmark, or when bitemarks and a football player were the most obvious references to make. Time and temporality are therefore both crucial elements of the phenomena of viral content, but at the same time it constitutes a challenge when studying them, if not positioned where and when they happen.

3.2 Genres

“On the internet, everything is accessible, anything is possible, therefore, everyone can make successful viral content.” In later cases of viral reality marketing, we shall see how this claim represents the way some companies, using viral reality marketing, initially thought, when applying

the strategy. Directing energy towards viral campaigns at first glance holds promises of success: It spreads faster, it costs less, and others voluntarily do the work of making sure awareness is boosted. Two things are important to keep in mind here; the first is, that making the right references is an art, that requires awareness and mastering of skills. The second concerns non-human actors who play a huge, yet often invisible, part in challenging the illusion of everything as being accessible to all.

Entering the field and becoming sufficiently native to make and appreciate, subtle cross-references, recognize classics, and even be able to contribute, illustrates that not everyone can make viral content *successfully*. The specific combinations of content and timing serve as in- and exclusions, as they speak only to those who get the reference. So even though digital content, events, pictures, quotes, and videos are accessible to all, making the right connections, in the right style, at the right time, is not equally achievable to all. Having access to content, is not the same as being able to appropriate the right connections between it.

The phenomenon of making viral content, bears similarities to the way Hippel (Hippel 2007; Hippel 2005) describes user-driven innovation, when it comes to portraying users and their role in innovation creation. It allows us to see how innovations emerge dispersed, motivated by independent individuals, who bring things together in new innovative ways out of their own interests. Yet, the empirical data raises questions when it comes to the democratization and the nonhierarchical networks that are also conceptualized in Hippel's approach to innovation, for even if everything may be accessible, not all is *equally* accessible. This has to do with the individual's frames of reference as well as the scripts, hashtags, and algorithms that interfere, amplify, and distort content. Before returning to these non-human actors, we need to understand what kinds of requirements it takes, to be able to make and appreciate references.

3.2.1 Multiple cross references - a genre made from a repertoire of "classics"

When in this section I refer to classics, it reflects references that are generally recognized, and are often made across different content that goes viral. Not all who share or adapt content will recognize these as classics; others will point to other references as being more representative as classics.

Appreciating content that links between different domains simultaneously, such as memes, spoofs, and parodies, requires specific knowledge. An anthropologist entering the field, does not just locate and start mapping out this type of content. Entering a society, culture, group, or practice takes time. To become part of a practice one must learn values, taboos, do's, and don'ts to navigate, and to be granted access. The researcher must acquire knowledge that is considered basic for the specific field.

There are rules, unwritten rules, and access to specific sites, networks and platforms that need to be negotiated. There is an awareness of how to communicate, and how to become familiar with terms, genres. Becoming a local amongst the informants takes time and is not always achievable to an extent where the researcher is considered purely "one of us", as mentioned briefly in the beginning of this dissertation. There are active processes of inclusion and exclusion of people. There are ways of communicating and referencing used specifically to reward those who are familiar with the genre and exclude those who are not.

The first access was given by informants sharing whatever they found amusing as "this is viral" but after experiencing an extensive overload of references to content, while still having a sense of missing out points, or not appreciating content the same way my informants did, I slowly learned that it required a knowledge of a set of classics. Classics can be described as a dynamic repertoire of things that are fun because they have been transformed into several creative outcomes. Recalling my initial reaction to the Hitler video that my husband's colleague showed me, not possessing the knowledge to recognize and place it as part of a genre, turned the Hitler video into a strange story, even though I knew the events that were referenced in the video. Had I instead known the concept of Hitler Rants Parodies without being familiar with the case of the Danish politician who blamed immigrants and their big families for their assumed consumption of cake and juice, that Hitler Rants Parody would not be funny either. I learned that it was the continuous creative interpretations and combinations of content, that kept the Hitler videos alive as classics.

Making a successful viral is about references, but not just *any* reference. This also calls for knowledge of established and temporarily trending genres[xxxi] within the culture of sharing and exchanging. Everyone can make a Hitler Rants Parody, but not everyone can make one that is found worthy of sharing. References will have to be made in a way that ads to both the Hitler video and the specific content or event it was connected to and the audience will have to know and recognize in advance the specific domains that are being creatively joined together.

Across several media - Cleveland meets Hitler

Recalling the initial critique of many studies pointing to the distinction between online and offline (Porter and Golan 2006; Goldenberg et al. 2007; Stringam and Gerdes 2010), tracing viral references reveals a much more complex culture of cross referencing: An art of bringing things from different domains together. References are not limited to the internet, they grow from moving between and

across media, between comedy, politics, movies, and cartoons. They are positioned in the ambiguous space between the political and the parody and are often self-referential and make use of metalevels.

For these references to make sense an audience will have to possess specific local knowledge of genres. To illustrate this, I have chosen to provide an example in which I was familiar with the various genres and the specific humor used. I use this story to exemplify that the reader, who may not instantly appreciate these references, is external to it. Therefore, in order for it to make sense, narrative work must be done to compensate for what is effortlessly and instantly hilarious content to me.

In the following piece of text, the story of the references between Hitler and Cleveland might seem messy to read with several interruptions and explanations of other shows and characters along the way. This is a deliberate choice, to give the reader an idea, of the level of referencing that goes on along with the story. Since this is a story from the Cleveland Show, let us start somewhere else: Family Guy.

Family Guy is a cartoon TV show made by Seth MacFarlane. A spinoff of Family Guy is called Cleveland Show. Both shows make many references without explaining too much, while drawing on specific knowledge on what is going on elsewhere, thereby rewarding those who recognize the references. As an example, on how references are made between these and other genres, the Cleveland Show refers to the Hitler meme mentioned earlier. In the episode named "Wide World of Cleveland Show", Cleveland ponders what his show would look like in different national versions. Germany was featured, by making a parody of the scene used in the Hitler Rants Parodies[xxxii]. In this version of the show, Cleveland played the role of Adolf Hitler, while many of the main, major, and recurring characters played his team of Nazis. Hitler was informed by Junior, (Cleveland's son) that the entirety of the writers of his show, (which is the same writers that makes Family Guy) were Jewish, either racially or religiously. This is a fourth wall joke. To the reader unfamiliar with the concept "the fourth wall", it is a performance convention in which an invisible, imagined wall separates actors from the audience. While the audience can see through this "wall", the convention assumes, the actors act as if they cannot see the audience or the camera. Family Guy very often reference this in its self-referential style, for instance Megan, the daughter in Family Guy, points to the camera (double ironic because cartoons do not have actors and cameras), demanding the cameras shut down, to which her brother Chris shouts: "you are breaking the fourth wall." Self-referencing, referencing to events outside the scope of the story, as well as breaking the fourth wall, occur often in many American

cartoons for adults.[22] This act of drawing attention to the actors as actors, while consciously reflecting upon it, is metatheatrical. It is very frequently used as a way of communicating both in memes, animated television shows as well as in the growing genre of fiktiobiografism.

Shifting back to the Cleveland Show, Hitler was infuriated and demanded that everyone who found Jewish comedian Billy Crystal humorous, was to leave the room, before he would blow up in rage (in the scene from Der Untergang everyone but four were asked to leave after which Hitler was infuriated). As the animated Hitler gets more and more infuriated, he draws the connections of why he ran a deli back on Family Guy (which shares many of the same writers as well as a range of recurring characters as the Cleveland Show). Tim, Cleveland's neighbor, then helped him understand why he constantly used words like "Oy," a Yiddish phrase expressing dismay or exasperation, and "Yarmulke," a brimless cap, usually made of cloth, traditionally worn by Jewish males to fulfill the customary requirement that the head be covered. After this rude awakening, Hitler's only consolation was, that all his writers were at least heterosexual, which unfortunately led Holt, another neighbor, to tell him that the likelihood of them all being gay was highly probable, since they lived in Hollywood. Hitler was quite unfazed by this, and said that he was not surprised, given all the gay jokes that were on his, that is, Cleveland's, show[xxxiii]. Seth MacFarlane, writer, and producer of both shows, often references gays and gay communities. To MacFarlane they are recurring themes throughout the shows, as well as external to it. The reference to gays is a piece of information noticeably clear to those who are familiar with Seth MacFarlane's work across cartoons, entertainment, and activism, yet to those not familiar with these connections, content may seem more offending.

The story of the relation between Hitler and the Cleveland Show illustrates the interconnectedness between various stories, characters, real live persons, and events, both within television shows and external to it. Since Hitler is a recurring secondary character in Family Guy, making a reference to Hitler, coming from Seth MacFarlane, on the topics of writers of the two series, in a setting where the characters have a tradition of being self-aware and breaking the fourth wall, the reference between Hitler and Cleveland is well placed, and, to the regular audience, great fun.

Cleveland Show and Family Guy, referring to Hitler does not escape Hitler Rants Parodies of course. So, he, and, just to clarify, I mean someone using the soundtrack and images of the specific scene in Der Untergang, and not Hitler Himself, responds by calling his animated twin. In a new video he then

[22] It is a comedy device used regularly, for example in Rick and Morty, Simpsons, Futurama, Sponge Bob, Archer, King of the Hill… to mention a few.

claims that Family Guy is crap, and that the only thing worth watching is Cleveland[xxxiv]. He is then informed by his men, that the Cleveland show has been canceled, to which he gets infuriated, and he sends out all but four men[xxxv].

Here ends the example of how the Hitler Rants Parody travels across media into television shows, and how, at the same time, the Hitler Rants Parodies make a reference back to the television shows. It further illustrates how references rely on the audience to have a specific knowledge to appreciate it. In the story of the Hitler - Cleveland references I have explicitly *not* tried to provide an uninterrupted story to illustrate how references take the audience back and forth between different contexts. I have tried to illustrate how it is both a story of an episode of Cleveland referencing the Hitler meme, and a specific Hitler meme referencing The Cleveland Show at the same time. For now, it is sufficient to say, that when locating things that go viral, we must look across various contexts, and look at how they are being connected in ways that mutually contribute to each other simultaneously.

Understanding the dynamics of a meme or genre like the Hitler Rants Parodies requires expanding the field to other media, but also to the interconnectedness between genres, memes and other things brought into play. Whereas everyone can make a Hitler Rants Parody by uploading new subtitles, not everyone can make a *successful* one. This requires skills in making references that contribute to several things simultaneously, while being recognized by an audience for their ability to do so. Understanding and appreciating such content likewise requires an awareness of references that goes across several domains. Studying them therefore requires moving from following one piece of viral content to focusing on how it is kept alive by multiple translations and across various domains, simultaneously.

3.2.2 Nonhierarchical networks, democratization, algorithms

Creating content, is not the same as mastering the right combinations of references between them. The same goes for distributing content. Even if anything is potentially accessible on the internet, not everything distributes equally. For instance, anyone can upload a video, or share a link, but that does not guarantee its reach. The video must get to people, connections must be made in ways that make it travel, and it must be placed where it gains exposure. Here we need to shift focus to networks connections and alliances.

Hippel's approach to innovations, made by heterogeneous people who innovate freely for their own interest (Hippel 2005), is helpful to keep in mind here. Viral as a phenomenon is about heterogeneous

people who all contribute. Yet a crucial thing that the empirical data reminds us of, is that accessibility does not mean that the same action from the user, leads to the same results. Algorithms, scripts, digital platforms as well as digital profiling that ensure customized content based on each user's specific action, all play a crucial role in translating, distributing, and distorting content.

The inclusion of the framework of ANT provides valuable insights when it comes to including the role of scripts, algorithms, and user profiling. Instead of looking at the relation between users and innovations, ANT treats both in analytically equal terms (Latour 1988; Latour 1986). To understand what makes an innovation, we need to focus on how actors, both human and non-human, mutually enlist, enroll, and mobilize themselves through relations to other actors, in order to become obligatory passage points, and be able to speak on behalf of others. Keeping specific references such as Hitler's Rants alive, is done by individual contributors who fill in new details and translate the meme into new versions. Their creative modifications are the driving force. It is un-orchestrated, emerges decentralized, and can emerge from the most unexpected places. No one asks, or pays the contributors, who ensure that the Hitler Rants Parody keep being referenced, to do so. Yet making successful content by timing and mastering the right references is only one of the crucial aspects that is important to the growth of viral content. Another is the non-human actor who makes and breaks connections as well.

Recall Latour's example of authoring a paper. It will only become definitive, if others take it up and use it as a matter of fact later. Any stabilization of fact or statement depends on action; therefore, it is always in jeopardy. Including non-human actors illustrates what kinds of action a video depends on, to shift from a video lying passively somewhere on a server, to traveling through wires, through air, and become a local copy on thousands of digital devices, geographically spread all over the world, as people watch the video. The non-human actors perform work in enabling distribution. The shift from a video being accessible, since everything is accessible on the internet, to the video actively reaching people, is only clear, if we direct attention to the work that non-human actors do. Links, algorithms, and digital infrastructures are an equally important part of the explanation of how something manages to become viral, as the human actors.

The following two examples will illustrate how one actor is sometimes many different locally dispersed ones, and likewise that many different actors can appear as one.

The relationship between one actor and many different actors

Power relations in ANT are achieved by being able to speak on behalf of others. These positions are fragile, and continuously negotiated by actors' actions. By successfully establishing obligatory passage points, that others chose to go through, and by establishing oneself as spokesperson for others, power is, if only temporarily, achieved.

We have already seen how liking a video conceals the action performed by the non-humans silently working in the background. In explicitly including non-human actors we can represent the connections that transform the like given in exchange for getting access to a video, into a personal recommendation of that video, differently. By including the non-human, we can reveal otherwise silenced translations. This allows us to use ANT to tell a different story. This approach can be used to elaborate on a seemingly simple task of sharing a video. Sharing a video is not what the action suggests, for what is shared is not the video, but a *reference to it*, a link. The link becomes the obligatory passage point that connects the video on a server, to the persons geographically and timely dispersed, while watching it. If the link is altered (say by a typo where someone accidentally adds or deletes a letter or number), the video can no longer be watched and does not exist to the user, even though it still may be on a server. But the link is not just a connection between viewer and video. As it is shared, it becomes integrated in specific infrastructures. When sharing a link on Facebook, algorithms distribute the link according to specific criteria. A user with 300 friends, who shares the link, does not provide exposure to 300 people. Facebooks algorithms are continually refined and altered to provide an experience for the user, that ensures that the user stays satisfied with the platform. Therefore, algorithms perform the work of sorting information. Any link posted by a user is actively distributed according to criteria predefined by Facebook. For instance, the algorithms are constructed to guess which relations in the user's network are most likely to find the link relevant. This is done based on an ongoing profiling of both the user and his or her connections through their interaction. Whereas this filtering of information may mostly be useful in providing the user with access to the content the user is likely to find relevant, it also illustrates how interactions are strongly mediated. This mediation and filtering, performed by algorithms, based on the individual user, is not exclusive to Facebook. Almost all online services with user profiles, adjust their algorithms in particular ways, to create an order in the information available to the user. On YouTube, recommended content, based on previous searches, is shown, while cookies keep track of the videos watched, to make it easier for the user to pick up where he or she left. News sites encourage their users to create a profile, so they can provide personalized content most likely to be relevant for the

user, but also most likely to keep them satisfied with the specific site to ensure, that they do not migrate to a competitor. The same goes for Google, Amazon, Netflix, and any other service that asks its users to create a profile. Other pages track the individual users' activities using cookies or third-party profiles, even the ones without a profile on the page in question. Multiple searches performed across different visits can be linked and then used to direct specific advertising content on that page as well as on other pages.

Algorithms serve to order content according to several interests, not necessarily visible, or in accordance with the users' own idea of what they want. Thus, a seemingly straightforward action such as sharing a link, is a highly mediated action. A link is an actor which, along with algorithms, connects people and content, thereby becoming an obligatory passage point. This obligatory point is, if only temporarily, able to hold together other actors and speak on behalf of all the local appearances of the video on digital platforms and digital devices, despite being geographically and temporally dispersed. This network is fragile and temporal. The power that holds the video and the link in a position where it speaks on behalf of millions can easily be lost.

The link might be compromised by a missing letter, or if the user decided to remove the video. But there are other threats as well. As we shall see in later examples of viral reality marketing, elements that a digital infrastructure such as YouTube find undesirable, enables YouTube to delete the video as well, and thereby remove the one video that is locally distributed as many. YouTube has filters registering undesired as well as illegal content. If a radio in the background of a video contains a piece of music that is copyrighted, if the video contains visual material from a copyrighted movie, or if the video contains nudity, the video is deleted by YouTube, and the thousand locally watched videos no longer exist as the links shift to direct to a "the content is no longer available" page.

Thus, sharing a video is sharing a link to it. Sharing a link strongly depends on, and is mediated by, algorithms and profiling. What may be experienced as one specific actor, the video, is a network of other actors enabling distorting and translating actions. Paying explicit attention to the non-human actors highlights how actors play a highly active role in enabling and restricting connections between users exchanging videos.

However, another benefit of paying attention to the non-human actors is equally important to mention: many different actors may appear as one. For instance, I often encountered informants talking about the same video. When paying attention to the specificities of the non-human actors, I realized, that it

was not one by many *different* videos they referred to. YouTube users often take a copy others' and reupload it to their own profile. This means that many copies of the same video exist simultaneously. If someone wants to delete their video, deleting it, does not make it disappear from YouTube, as long as other users feature copies on their YouTube profiles.

Several companies have been known to retract commercial videos from YouTube, if their messages are misunderstood, or if the debates surrounding them turn into undesired critique. In practice however, they often fail in removing the video. Firstly, because many local copies appear on various profiles, and secondly because of the Streisand effect, where people push back at the removal by repeatedly reuploading it. Thus, paying attention to non-human actors creates awareness of one actor as being able to speak on behalf of many, but also of many actors speaking on behalf of one. I will return to these insights later in chapter four. For now, it is sufficient to illustrate how viral content is integrated in highly digitally mediated settings, as well as traveling between several of them. Content is distorted, displaced, and translated. By focusing on how digital infrastructures constantly translate and displace content, it becomes clear that turning content into something viral, is not as democratic and freely accessible to all as Hippel's framework suggests. If we are to understand how these non-human actors affect exchanges of viral content, we must take them seriously, by paying attention to reconfigurations that happen as both humans and non-humans actively translate, disperse, displace, and distribute content. The ambiguities between global and local have shifted from a matter of geography to a matter of pinpointing what local means in specific instances. For instance, smaller groups of people are connected through a mutual recognition of specific reference, yet they may not necessarily be otherwise connected. These connections are highly relevant to study, but their fragile and very loosely connected nature makes them more difficult to specify and characterize by simply referring to geographic, demographic, or cultural boundaries. A single actor may speak on behalf of many silent ones, and many distinct actors may appear as a single one; this requires a revised approach to the non-human actors that are part of these relations. Whereas ANT takes all actors seriously, it does not capture when actors are both one and many at the same time. Nor does it capture that the characteristics of an actor may differ depending on perspective. ANT fails to cover, and thus explain, the ambiguity that roles of actors may simultaneously be the same, yet different.

Until now I have illustrated the environment in which people use references to include and exclude others. I have also illustrated how non-human actors, through digital mediation, play an equally crucial role in distorting amplifying and silencing content. The following example brings these two

discussions together to illustrate a significant challenge in accounting for viral stories. Two elements in particular will be emphasized: the fleeting and highly local reference making and its relation to representing the story in general, and the role of digital timestamps as non-human actors that define a particular relation between content and time. We now move from contemplating how to conceptualize viral stories, to the implications for constructing narratives of them.

3.3 Ordering and boundary-making in viral stories

Telling a story of something viral illustrates the ongoing work and challenges in creating order, both when encountering events and accounting for them retrospectively. Viral stories are often chaotic. They are everywhere at once yet fleeting. They are shared by many yet made up by multiple references that make sense in various local settings but not necessarily outside them. Most references require specific knowledge to appreciate the references, just as they may only temporarily constitute relevant references. Unexpected references suddenly become related by well-crafted and well-timed juxtapositions, and the time in which these references are relevant, is short-lived and highly temporary. They constitute unpredictable connections that are made ad hoc, across various platforms, and between individuals that are not closely related. To illustrate this, the following example concerns a giraffe named Marius, who was euthanized in Copenhagen Zoo during my fieldwork. While accounting for these events I will illustrate the complexities in explaining what went on.

In the following story of Marius, the references made, and the excerpts provided, are the ones I find relevant for you, the reader, to know. I have organized the story according to digital timestamps, thereby presenting a chronological account of what went on. However, many elements of the story were not encountered in the chronological order that the timestamp presents. Furthermore, references, as they occurred according to the chronological order, did not always make sense, were not visible, or did not become related, until at a later point in time. To illustrate the complexities emerging from attempting to encounter, as well as tell, such stories, I will give voice to two versions of myself that supplement the story. The purpose of the additional voices is two-fold: Firstly, I want to draw specific attention to the way time-stamp chronology, used to sort the list of events, is a specific order, among others. Secondly, I will illustrate how references that are relevant to some informants might not be, or might not yet have become, relevant to others.

One voice is positioned in the timeline presented, as I encountered content related to the giraffe Marius, this voice is based on fieldnotes featuring my initial reactions. It represents all the reactions and questions that emerged at that specific time when I encountered the events. The other voice

represents me in the role of analyst and writer, reflecting on what needs to be added for the reader, who was not there, and who may not have recognized or appreciated the specific references that were clear to me.[23] This last voice is eager to add extra information, ensuring that the reader has the proper background knowledge. It tries to compensate for the references that are no longer obvious to the reader. It fills out gaps by providing context, explanation, and attempts to make the reader appreciate the references. These gaps are both due to the passage of time, and to the assumption that the reader is not part of the same networks as the writer.

Ethnographer: This is me as ethnographer in the field. This voice represents doubts and critique that came up in the encounters with the events, even when they often later became irrelevant, when doubt was replaced with explanations and certainty.

Writer: This is me as the researcher looking back, while explaining and providing relevant context for the reader. This voice represents me being explicitly aware of, and accounting for, several things: My position in time, being different as I tell the story, from when I encountered the events, the reader's position in disposition to the time in which events occurred, and finally the reader in disposition to the specific references that made sense to me as I recognized specific cross domain references.

29. June 2013: The headline of the online news magazine Rokokoposten announces. "*Food is made from animals that were killed*!"

Writer: Wait for it, it will become relevant…

Summer 2013: Top Gear drives a Zenvo sports car on a test track.

Writer: At this point it was not relevant to note that the color is orange, that it is produced in Denmark, or that it caught fire. These elements are not yet relevant connections to make. But read along for the chronological story of Marius, and 5 months later in the timeline it will become so.

February 9th, 2014: Copenhagen Zoo chose to euthanize one of their young male giraffes. The argument for the euthanasia was that the giraffe had a DNA too close to other giraffes.

[23] Based on my specific knowledge of, and specific interest in certain TV shows and internet memes.

"Copenhagen Zoo's giraffes are part of an international breeding program which aims at ensuring a healthy giraffe population in European zoos. […]

[…]When breeding success increases it is sometimes necessary to euthanize." (Copenhagen Zoo 2014).

Since the animal was too big for an autopsy to be performed indoors, the zoo announced a public autopsy in the zoo, so that interested guests could learn more about the animal from watching and asking questions. The news of the plans for euthanasia, however, traveled worldwide.

Writer: This could be where it all started. Our main character of the story Marius enters the story here.

February 10th, 2014: A video featuring Hitler being informed that the Danes have been executing a giraffe while displaying it to the public is published. Hitler rages at his men for bringing it up, since they had all been to the canteen earlier that day and ate meat without complaining. They are portrayed as hypocrites. (The Death of Marius the Giraffe 2014)

February 10th, 2014: (Originally posted 29 June 2013):

The online news magazine Rokokoposten featured an article with the headline: "Food is made from murdered animals"

Ethnographer: The link to this news is shared by two of my friends, independently, on Facebook. I notice that is a post originally published by Rokokoposten in June 2013.

Writer: Yes, you saw this in the beginning of this timeline. Chronologically, according to time stamps, it fits twice. It fits when it was published by Rokokoposten in 2013, but it also fits when it is

published by users on Facebook in 2014. Therefore, it is included twice in the timeline presented, since it reappeared as a new post to those who shared it.

February 15th, 2014: Mads & Monopolet discusses an incoming letter from a mother. She has a son, who is one-year old, who is going to be dressed for Fastelavn[24] in his older brother's costume. There are only two problems: 1) it is a giraffe costume, and 2) the boy's name is Marius. She asks if the panel thinks she should proceed or abort.

Writer: Mads & Monopolet is a weekly radio podcast dealing with moral dilemmas submitted by listeners. The panel is known to consist of public figures, and it reaches between 600.000 and 900.000 weekly listeners. All dilemmas discussed are open to comments on Monopolet's Facebook page, meaning an even greater reach (Mads og Monopolet 2014).

The panel finds it hilarious. They call it a one-time opportunity to create a good story, and even suggest that the mother, in addition, might go dressed as the vet, or that Marius carry a lion to illustrate a friendship between the animals. They agree that it is a nice way to make the whole thing more unpretentious. They suggest that she contacts the press to tell the story, because, as they reply: "This is the way Danes deal with these kinds of things." However, it is not necessary to contact the press, they have picked it up by themselves, as have a lot of people on various social media. The panel mentions how the zoo director, in an interview, was very honest and very sober in his argumentation for the killing of the animal. This made him a likeable man that people sympathized with. They claim that the interview managed to change a lot of people's minds to support the acts of the zoo, because it seems fair. Therefore, they suggest that the mother does likewise. A regular storm, a sort of mix of shit- and love storm, starts on various social media platforms. Some find it hilarious; some are truly offended.

Ethnographer: Why should Marius carry a Lion?

Writer: Did not notice at the time that after his death, Marius was fed to the lions, even though the timeline has already revealed this to the reader.

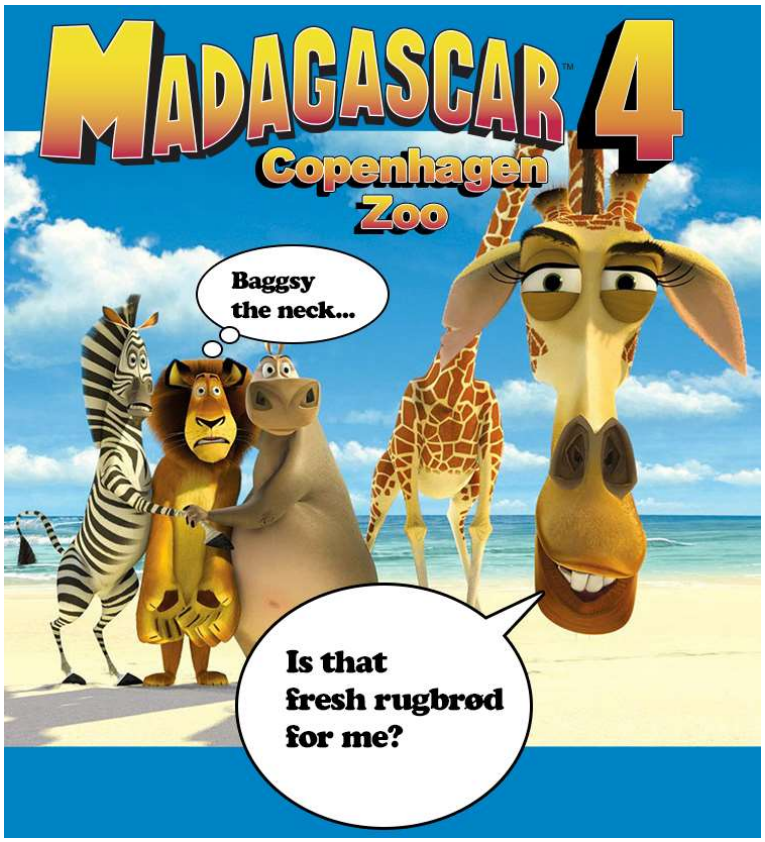
[24] The Danish equivalent to Shrove Tuesday and Pancake Day.

February 15th 2014: Rokokoposten, a Danish satire news site, writes under the headline: "Danish "High-school-male" euthanized in Czech Zoo" (Rokokoposten 2014).

Writer: This is satire, and the news plays on various other stories, including Danish high school students who go to Prague with their teachers, while often ending up so drunk that they are sent home, or sometimes even falling off windows in hotel rooms or being hit by cars. Recently several such stories of drunk Danish teenagers in Prague have been covered by the press. The satire news narrates, in a language remarkably similar to the serious news media, while describing how the male student did not feel anything. This last bit is a clear reference to the vet who described the euthanasia and emphasized that Marius was distracted and "did not feel anything" when shot.

February 15th, 2014, A blogger posted two humorous pictures linking the giraffe to the brands Madagascar and Carlsberg.

"So, I had a little fun. Apologies to the companies involved. Please get in touch if you want this content removed. And thanks to my friend Brian Erritsø Olsen for allowing me to use his genuine photo from the lions eating Marius the giraffe."(Cameron 2014).

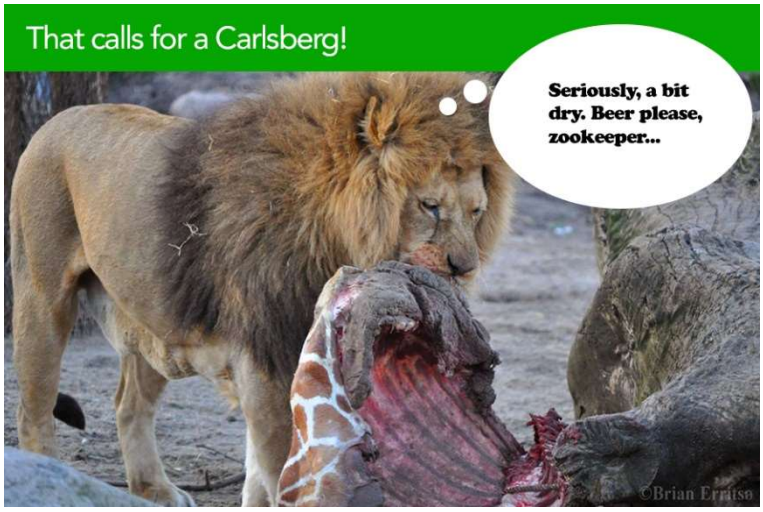


Writer: "Rugbrød" is the Danish name for rye bread.

Ethnographer: RYE BREAD?!? Two references to it by now! Why? Have I missed some other big parody, or is rye bread just recognized as typical Danish and therefore referred to?

Writer: I only got this a week later, after watching an interview on CNN with the vet telling what happened prior to the euthanasia:

"He walked out quarter past 9 this morning. Then there was a zookeeper with some rye bread. He really likes rye bread. And I said: here you go Marius, here is some rye bread. I stood behind him with a rifle. And when he put his head forward and ate the rye bread. Then I shot him through the brain. It sounds violent, but it means Marius had no idea it was coming. He got his bread, and then he died. I think this is very important. This is about HOW this is taking place" (CNN 2014))



(Cameron 2014)

Writer: "That calls for a Carlsberg" is the slogan of the Danish beer Carlsberg [25]. even though it may be confused with real time marketing made by Carlsberg, which they often practice, here it is not.

February 15th 2014: Another meme found by Google image search on Marius, giraffe, and memes (The Retriever, Dog, & Wildlife Blog 2014).

[25] Note, that this is not real-time marketing coming from Carlsberg, it is a spoof. However, to the audience they work the same way.

Ethnographer: Laughs [contemplates sharing it on Facebook].

Writer: The evil Facebook giraffe refers to an otherwise unrelated game circulating on Facebook, in which users post a riddle. Their friends then try to answer it, and if they fail, they must post the riddle on their wall and change their profile picture to a giraffe for a week. Even if not participating the number of people who suddenly had giraffes for profile pictures were hard to miss for Facebook users in Denmark in spring 2014. Yet to people outside this platform at the specific time, the reference made no sense.

February 16th 2014: The weekly car show Top Gear (Top Gear Episode List 2014)) reviewed a car produced in Denmark. The test-drive had been filmed months before the air date. However, during the first test the car broke down. A new one was sent, and it too broke down, while bursting into flames.

Whereas the filming of the Danish test car had taken place long ago, the show where it was mentioned, was recorded shortly before airing, and shortly after the story of Marius had been featured in several international media. One of the hosts, in his review of the car, made a reference between the car and the newly killed giraffe. "*This is Danish, and its orange, and it's genetically flawed. I'm surprised they haven't called it giraffe, and shot it.*" (Jeremy Clarkson Tests the Zenvo ST1 (Top Gear Season 21 Ep.3) 2014).

Ethnographer: Laughing. Posting on Facebook. Appreciating the reference between the car and the giraffe. I love references that are subtle and not spelled out or explained too much. I get it! Most of the audience may not!

Writer: This was Top gear's semi offensive comment to Denmark. Viewers who are familiar with the show know that they often make references to events that are not related directly to cars. These references are often offensive, for instance, when one of the three hosts, Jeremy Clarkson, claimed

that in the US one needs a permit to do anything, except for purchasing weapons (The Times 2006). In another episode, he mocks a BMW Mini by claiming that BMW should build a car that is "quintessentially German". He suggests that Hitler salutes should be displayed, and that "a sat-nav that only goes to Poland" should be included. Very often, cars from one country while having motors from another are commented upon. Not so much because of the different countries, but because they think that a car that is not an Audi but has an Audi engine is cheating. A car being genetically flawed may refer to part of it being produced by other car producers. The program has made jokes about Muslims, Mexicans, gypsies, handicapped, and gays, (BBC News 2006; Mediafax 2009; Metro 2010; Reuters 2014) thus making the show about cars as well as about relations and attitudes toward particular groups of people and nationalities. It is this context that enables us to make sense of Clarkson's comment about the Danish car (The Scotsman 2005). Just as viewers familiar with Seth MacFarlane are aware of the way gays and Jews are portrayed as part of a recurring joke, so are regular Top Gear viewers aware of the recurring negative comments considering other nationalities and the references to specific events in these countries during the show. Recognizing the genre while also the specific event with the giraffe, provides a context for understanding the relevance of mocking Denmark.

February 14th 2014: Berlingske brings the news that a radio program has made a tribute to the giraffe (Berllinske, Nationalt 2014) [26]

Writer: This is an example of how a satire becomes translated into regular news.

February 23rd, 2014:

In a Top Gear Episode, the car journalist Richard Hammond is teased by his co-hosts because his favorite car ignited. They strap a pizza to his crotch and heat it with a blow torch. They then tell him that the pizza could be heated on his car instead.

[26] A category of data has been excluded here: the whole, *serious*, media debate of whether it was humane to kill the giraffe or not. As such, this cannot be separated from the satire, for the satire makes sense only due to knowledge of the debate. Yet it is excluded here. The purpose here is to illustrate timeline complexity alone. The serious debate would have added a complexity of ethics, racism, euthanasia, animal welfare, which of course was also related and brought to life by the story of Marius.

Writer: You must know how Richard Hammond, in the episode following the one with the Danish Zenvo, too, had a car bursting into flames. Not his own, but the new Porsche GT3 he just bought, was called back due to problems with the GT3's igniting. You also need to know how the co-hosts continuously mock him with his favorite car brand: the Porsche. As a consequence, his co-hosts decided to make a gimmick. (Jeremy Blowtorches a Pizza Attached to Hammond 2014).

If we are following a timeline here, this has not yet become relevant to the Marius story. What makes it relevant, does not happen before next month, when someone makes a drawing that connects the Danish Zenvo with the British journalist who loves the Porsche. Furthermore, it only becomes relevant to those who have seen two distinct episodes of Top Gear mentioned and are familiar with The Danish company Zenvo's immediate response to Top Gear's critique, as they responded by emphasizing how they were proud of their product despite the ignition.

Thus, the event with the burned pizza is not related to Marius directly, but it is a part of the story that cannot be left out if we are to account for the events that will later follow when a Countryball comic enters the timeline.

February 28th, 2014: Mads & Monopolet posts a link on Facebook to their 157,219 followers. The link refers to the serious media now discussing the ethics of Marius (Mads og Monopolet Facebook page 2014).

March 2nd,2014: A user on Reddit submits a drawing mimicking the difference in response between Denmark and Britain in the format of a meme called Countryballs.

Writer: Countryballs, is an art style occasionally used in online comics, in which countries are typically personified as spherical characters decorated with their country's flag. The characters poke

fun at national stereotypes and international relations, as well as historical conflicts. The corresponding reactions from Denmark and Britain respectively refer to Richard Hammond being ashamed that his car ignited, while the Danish car company Zenvo responded to Top Gear's review and the car igniting, by stating that they were proud of what they had achieved with their sports car.

Ethnographer: This is awesome! Top Gear, Marius, *and* memes. This is interesting. Better take a screen dump.

Writer: the drawing indicates a difference between Danish and British pride. This is a cross reference to two cars both tending to ignite. Whereas the Danish company behind the Zenvo tested in Top Gear is proud and defends it afterwards, Richard Hammond, the British TV host of Top Gear, reacts with shame as his favorite Porsche bursts into flames.

The drawing additionally refers to a genre within Memes known as Draw Ball and a subgenre; Poland Ball, that later had a spin off: Country Ball. It is a user-generated cartoon that follows the lives of ball-shaped creatures representing different and international drama, surrounding their diplomatic relations. If the audience does not possess this knowledge, the drawing becomes irrelevant to the Marius story and takes with it the event of Hammond getting blowtorched as well.

Here, specific knowledge about several events is required. Ones must know that: Top Gear made references to Marius and the Zenvo, that the Zenvo ignited, that Hammond loves Porches and is continuously mocked for it, that Hammond's new Porsche was called back due to ignition problems, that Country Ball is a genre that deals with differences between nationalities in a satirical way.

March 26th, 2014: A creative combination of Copenhagen Zoo's logo and crosshairs

Ethnographer: Nice! Screen dump!

Writer: Here is the original

March 28th, 2014: Nationens Øje announces that three employees from Copenhagen Zoo were fired, and then fed to the lions this morning. They were too old, and did not manage to fulfill their job descriptions well anymore (Nationens Øje 2014).

Writer: Nationens Øje is a Danish satire site.

March 28th, 2014: Monopolet published a new post on Facebook to tell their followers that the news media continued discussing their dilemma of Marius.

Writer: Here, it is particularly interesting to note where the information from Monopolet's post travels. Firstly, the post, and the link to the news media telling the story of how Monopolet went viral, appears on the followers of Monopolet's Facebook page. But this is not all. It also gets distributed

through the newsfeed of the 3702 people who clicked the like button below the post. This click indicates an activity on Facebook, which Facebook then passes on to the friends of 3702 people.

76 people shared the link. This means that they posted a copy of the content on their own wall. Their friends are informed that they shared it. 394 people wrote comments, and likewise this activity gets automatically distributed to their connections. Thus, information gets distributed far and wide. All these activities further contribute to the spreading of the story of Marius. Serious ethical discussions, promotion of a radio broadcast, and entertainment, are mingled and dispersed simultaneously through one obligatory passage point: The post where Monopolet illustrates what they had started.

This of course raises the question of whose story we are following. Is this the story of Marius, or the story of Monopolet being able to create viral fuzz from their dilemmas? The answer is that it is both, but awareness of whose story is told, plays a role is which pieces of information should be included.

It is interesting to look at the comments on this post. A huge number of the comments provided the first three weeks after the post was uploaded go something like, “stop this discussion. Why do you keep continuing. It’s just a boy who by coincidence has the wrong name!” Such comments, despite suggesting that the discussions should stop, act to fuel the debate and ensure that the posts stay alive and continue to pop up in participants’ feeds. This contributes to the earlier mentioned discussion of linking and hijacking, where people participate for one reason, while, due to the work of algorithms, contributing to something quite different.

March 29th, 2014: A twitter user makes a comparison of death penalties in the US as opposed to the giraffes and lions.

Ethnographer: Better take a screenshot. Otherwise, I will never be able to find this again.

Writer: Good thing I saved this. It would be difficult to find now.

April 1st, 2014: Jobindex, a database for job advertisements in Denmark, advertises a job in Zoo as chief of marketing for their new collection of bags, accompanied by this picture, and signed by Copenhagen Zoo.

On a meta level, it encourages people to share the positive sides of animals being killed by converting dead animals into beautiful and positive stories (Jobindex 2014).

Ethnographer: Stunt of some sort? [Later the same day] …Of course, it makes sense. It is April 1st. This gets removed by the end of the day. Get screenshot!

Writer: It was an April fools' joke. The very date is what allows a serious site like Jobindex.dk to make fun of the Marius incident. Just as in real time, marketing timing plays a crucial role. This joke was a result of the temporality in which the date, the incident with Marius, and the already ongoing trend of creating new content referring to it, existed simultaneously.

Here ends the story of Marius. Or does it? The timeline chosen here stops, but events referring to it may continue[27].

As a device for highlighting the work that goes into turning viral events into narratives, I have given voice to two different versions of myself as I did fieldwork as well as when trying to translate the events into a piece of text. The first voice illustrates how I was positioned in relation to events as they occurred chronologically. It highlights a challenge in chronological narration, since some things are not related to the campaign as they happen (according to timestamps), even when, later, they *become* related. Furthermore, events are not necessarily experienced in the same order, meaning that some recognition of references does not happen as they are encountered. I, for instance, had no clue about the relevance of rye bread, despite encountering it. I noticed it while assuming the reference must have meant something, but I did not recognize it yet.

Timestamps as devices for telling a story, serve to create an overview of the elements it consists of. However, from this way of ordering the story, two obstacles emerge. The story is experienced in many different orders, and the boundaries for what counts as part of it, are varying depending on the local recognition of references. Thus, plural versions of stories exist simultaneously. Telling the story of Marius, as it happened, according to timestamps, is one way of creating order, but as we have seen, the material does not always fit this order. The same becomes visible with the story of the Hitler Rants Parodies references in the Cleveland Show. Here, to tell the story, in a way that makes sense to the reader, the narrator must jump back and forth too. This is a move, not in time, as in the Marius story,

[27] See for instance these examples spanning from research to cultural analysis to sites that provide writing services (papersOwl.com 2019; Borsje 2014; Hanson 2016; Dailyhive.com 2017; Bardram 1997; The Guardian 2015).

but between domains, genres, and platforms, while actively directing the reader towards the pivotal connections between American pop culture, and the background of Seth MacFarlane, as well as the practice of cross-referencing. Marius, as well as Hitler, illustrate the challenges in translating past events of briefly made connections into a coherent story to someone external to it. They also serve to highlight and illuminate the partial perspectives of those who encounter it.

While the voice of the ethnographer tried to bring into the story my initial reactions, the second voice illustrate the gaps between, and in- and exclusions of, what is related to the story, depending on what is known, and to whom, at a specific time. It highlights the work that needs to be done to convert the story into a coherent and relevant one. This also emphasizes that the content presented tells *a* story, not *the* story. Many of my informants, just like the reader, did not get the references related to specific TV shows or internet memes. Similarly, I may have missed many references that others, with a different repertoire of things fit for reference, have made. This second voice highlights additional information that is required for the story to make sense to you, the reader, who may not be familiar with Draw Ball, and its sub-genre of Country Ball, Rokokoposten, Monopolet, Top Gear or many of the other elements included. Boundary-making, in terms of what is part of the viral story of Marius, is very global in that the story spreads across country borders, as well as media genres such as regular news (CNN, Berlingske), TV entertainment (Top Gear), branding (Job.net), Satire (Rokokoposten, Mashable, Nationens Øje), Memes (classic picture with text meme, Draw Ball). The themes of animal rights, Nazis and Jews also act as catalyst for bringing into the debate more serious matters that serve to boost awareness of the story in mass media. Yet, despite the story spreading globally and across geographical boundaries; across differing genres such as satire, memes and news; and across different media platforms, it is also very local with respect to the specific elements that are recognized and considered relevant to the different people involved.

The timestamps as actors provide an explicit, universal order of events and content. They often tend to suggest a neutral order, and when reconstructing what happened, timelines and chronological accounts are often used to indicate what *really* happened. They can then be used as a fixed ordering, highlighting how informants encountered them differently. Their asynchronous responses can then be mapped against them. This is one way of telling stories. It provides a handy tool for comparing data, but another may be to disregard timestamps as privileged actors; an approach I will go further into in chapter five.

3.3.1 Time, temporality, and its challenges

The story of Marius illustrates inherent complexities in accounting for something going viral. Two important challenges need highlighting: firstly, handling inconsistencies between different versions during spatial and temporal boundary-making; and secondly retrospectively weaving highly fragmented stories into a single, coherent narrative.

Boundary-making for the fluid elements of viral content is difficult. The connections, i.e., the references between content, is highly temporary, which means that things often only make sense in a certain temporal context. Yet at the same time, they can reach across "borders" and transcend perceived timespans such as that of an individual campaign. When it comes to space, references are recognized as such in highly local contexts. These should neither be thought of as "physical space" nor "platforms," as such contexts can equally well exist as fragile, temporary relations between people with no a priori links.

Earlier I showed how becoming a local amongst the informants takes time. However, a counter concern may emerge from the instances where I had become local to a degree where I could appreciate references that most people aware of the Marius story, including the reader of this dissertation, would miss. To grasp the classic meme references, one had to be locally positioned in time and space. Participants held together by specific references at a specific time cannot easily be located by pregiven boundaries such as platforms, communities, or demographics. Such relations are rarely as stable or well defined as longer lived contexts. Previous studies using key concepts such as online or on the internet (Raula Girboveanu and Puiu 2008), local, national, and cultural contexts (Cintas and Sánchez 2006; Lu 2008; Mio Bryce 2010), and influencers (Katz and Lazarsfeld 2005), consider relatively stable boundaries, which do not cover the above brief, ad hoc relations.

Viral content is generated by references between content, more than the content itself. The impromptu connections between people who share and appreciate specific references, originate through ad hoc relations between those who recognize specific juxtapositions of references, more than through shared platforms or existing communities. Therefore, diving empirically into content, be it Hitler, Marius, a picture of a beer alongside bitemarks, or the creative spellings of the word "fadøl", illustrates how the practice of viral content calls for different measures, when trying to capture what is going on, and how to account for it.

These analytical challenges in defining and presenting boundary-making, are the crux of the second methodological challenge: How does the writer construct narratives of transpired events when these are dispersed in time, highly local in their relations, and almost always in disposition to the reader?

However, before returning to this crucial matter, in the following chapter we need to move from viral stories, such as Marius, to campaigns that try to take advantage of these already ongoing practices of reference making. As we shall see, this takes the discussed challenges to the next level. For where the example of Marius increases awareness of the differently encountered chronologies, as well as dispersed fragile and highly temporary connections, viral reality marketing pushes both issues even further by deliberately encouraging stories to develop inconsistently with each other to increase momentum. For what people are connected to is deliberately designed to be ambiguous. Therefore, studying it becomes a matter of both considering the fleeting connections and the fact that what holds them together does so *because* it is ambiguous.

4. Temporality

This chapter puts forth empirical data to highlight temporarily existing relations, potential futures, and strategic ambiguity.

4.1 Non-human actors facilitate cooperation with and without aligned interests

In the beginning of this dissertation, I was concerned with how a company could succeed in making people voluntarily spread awareness of a brand. Including non-human actors added an additional layer to the descriptions of the interactions, which gave voice to otherwise silent actors. Actors interact due to their shared interest in the alliances. Yet, as the empirical material presented in this chapter will illustrate, alliances may hold different interests in place simultaneously. There are many variants and degrees of voluntary participation. Aligned interests need further elaboration and refinement.

For instance, some campaigns involving non-human actors enable people to create awareness of a brand, not because they want to create awareness, but because their participation aligns with their other interests. Through two examples, I will show how non-human actors can bind human actors with diverse interests together. In the first, non-human actors facilitate networks of actors with aligned interests, while in the second, they hold them together despite conflicting interests.

4.1.1 Hashtags fulfilling several interests simultaneously

Empirically, paradoxes became visible during my fieldwork. Informants indicated that they "liked" videos despite not liking them, and they did not consider themselves to be participants in specific campaigns despite sharing ads. As I was trying to understand what was going on, the differences between the people who wanted to create specific awareness and the people who contributed for other reasons, became a subject for further exploration, as informants were both participating and not participating at the same time. As opposed to tricking people into actions, such as click- and like-jacking, SoMe marketing is about making the audience want to engage. This differs from traditional marketing, where people are involuntarily exposed to brands through ads. But what counts as wanting to engage? Analytically, we can use the language of ANT by explaining engagement as translation. This allows us to ask how brands design content through which both brands and potential targets are willing to translate their interests. The concept of obligatory passage points is an obvious place to start. This analytical device enables capturing how mutual actors translate their own interests into engagement in a specific way, e.g., ensuring that the brand becomes an integral part of the content that gets shared and distributed by participants.

We can ask how brands manage to interest, enroll, and enlist others to stabilize their brand as an obligatory passage point (Callon 1986). We can consider cooperation to be successful when there is an obligatory passage point that interests others. Brand-created games on social media are elements that can be seen as obligatory passage points, since they translate several interests at the same time, while both facilitating brand awareness and relying on participants to engage voluntarily.

Gaming social media and brands

In a campaign from January 2015, Carlsberg wanted to put the focus on the classic beer on tap, while taking advantage of digital opportunities and social media (Carlsberg Digitaliserer Ølhanen 2015). They developed an app that integrated the beer tap, a screen in the bar, free beer, and the hashtag #Barbandits. The Carlsberg beer tap had a sensor that interacted with the screen in the bar. When a beer was poured from the Carlsberg tap, three random pictures were projected to a big screen at the bar, accompanied by the hashtag #barbandits. Inspired by one-armed bandits (slot machines), if the same picture occurred three times, then the person who posted the picture won a free beer. The pictures were randomly chosen among already posted pictures on Instagram that included the hashtag. To have a chance of appearing on the screen, bar guests would have to take a picture of themselves and post it on social media along with the hashtag. Thus, the hashtag would feature a collection of people from all the bars that participated, and the visibility of the bars, the brand, and the happy guests would be featured on social media as well.

Translations and obligatory passage points

If we are to think about this as a network of actors, specifically in relation to the concept of translation, we can say that Carlsberg attempted to create an obligatory passage point. Through *problematization*, they strived to become indispensable. They tried to *interest* bar owners by enhancing customer experiences. They designed a game which could be shared between several parties. As they engaged, people on social media were exposed to the brand as well. Yet, *interessement* does not necessarily lead to an alliance. Work must be done, roles must be defined and attributed to actors who accept them, before the interessement can be successful.

Following the interessement, the next phase is about *enrollment*, i.e., defining and coordinating the roles so they fit the alliance. Carlsberg made a brilliant game with a technical setup that potentially provided free beer, raised public awareness of people having fun, increased beer sales at the bars, potentially increased numbers of customers, but that still required active work from all enrolled parties. For instance, that the bar owner installs and maintains the sensor and screen and ensures that

they are not only connected to each other, but also the internet; that people bring their phone, successfully install the app, and post pictures using the correct tag; that people are willing to appear on social media publicly and that their reward is worth the effort of their actions. Simply creating a game does not ensure brand exposure; others must accept their ascribed role if Carlsberg is to succeed.

The final phase is the *mobilization*. The device is made to interest, enlist, and enroll others; however, the purpose is not purely about local bar guests having fun. The goal is also to create brand awareness. Very few bar guests will get a free Carlsberg beer. Yet many more are exposed to the brand through pictures of people having fun in a bar being voluntarily shared on social media. These shared pictures become the official representatives carrying the word of Carlsberg far and wide through the digital infrastructures, algorithms, links, and hashtags.

The logo is made mobile through a series of transformations, which all depend on facilitation by the digital infrastructures. The hashtag #Barbandits holds together the brand, the social activities at the bars, and the people either connected to those posting pictures or exposed to the hashtag through algorithms suggesting the specific content posted along with the hashtag.

Through a game, Carlsberg manages to establish an obligatory passage point for people wanting to participate. The concept of translation helps us to elaborate on how someone voluntarily spreads awareness of brands, even if the brand itself is not part of their motivation. Obligatory passage points make the mutual interests in participating visible, but they also divert our attention from conflicts and resistance. Actors translating their interests to go through a specific passage point become a successful story of the actor who made the passage point, as well as those who have their interests fulfilled through it. Now we shift focus to obligatory passage points and how they facilitate conflicting interests.

4.1.2 Hashtags facilitating conflicts

Hashtags are non-human actors that can, on an intuitive level, be understood as “headlines.” They are used on a variety of social media platforms. Thus, the hashtag #ObamaCare, will act as a link. If one user posts a message, e.g., “Obama lies! No money for handicapped people #ObamaCare” and another writes “best president ever! #ObamaCare,” both will be displayed side by side when clicking on the link. Opposing interests are presented side by side. Some use this strategically to hijack and take over hashtags. For instance, #myNYPD was introduced by the New York Police Department as an attempt to engage an audience and create public awareness about the police work being done. The official Twitter account for the NYPD, @NYPDnews, tweeted: "*Do you have a photo w/ a member*

of the NYPD? Tweet us & tag it #myNYPD. It may be featured on our Facebook." The tweet included a sample photo of a smiling citizen with two police officers. The message got a lot of attention, but not the kind the NYPD had hoped for. Images of police violence and accusations of brutality filled tweets. For instance, the @OccupyWallStNYC account posted a photo of an officer moving to hit people with a baton accompanied by the message: "*Here the #myNYPD engages with its community members, changing hearts and minds one baton at a time.*" The rise in critical content posted along with the hashtag is an example of the Streisand Effect mentioned earlier. Whenever someone wants to glorify or hide something, or has a strong message, a counter reaction can be expected. Nothing unites people like reacting to a message in protest, either for serious reasons or as a humorous comment. It has become an integral part of how things become viral.

Hashtags are used strategically as devices for connecting people and content. But they do not necessarily facilitate successful cooperation for all. The hashtag is an actor that links, holds together, connects, and juxtaposes content, but it also facilitates conflicts. It becomes an obligatory passage point that enables several parties to attempt to get their interests fulfilled simultaneously.

As we continue to viral reality marketing, non-human actors such as hashtags, slogans, themes, stories, and images, become even more complex. Whereas the challenge until now has been between companies creating content that hold together different interests (#Barbandits) and hashtags used in conflicting ways contrary to how they were designed (#Obamacare #myNYPD), in viral reality marketing the elements that hold interested parties are *deliberately* designed to be ambiguous, spurring conflict and debate. From analytically treating something that holds together by looking at how it is used differently, we shift to something that holds interested parties together *because* it is ambiguous and thus many different things at the same time.

4.2 Viral reality marketing

The necessity of emphasizing differences in interests despite cooperation increases when we look at viral reality marketing. It is pivotal for viral reality marketing that content is deliberately made ambiguous to generate momentum and to interest more people. The continuous growth of these viral campaigns, hinges on conflicting interests, diverse interpretations, missing pieces, and an overflow of loose, disconnected information. Disagreements, conflicts, and diverse interests are the very driving forces.

In the examples we discussed earlier, one actor acts as many and many as one. But sameness and difference in ANT is always one or the other. ANT is about mapping actors and their relations but not explaining them. Therefore, actors such as the hashtag facilitating conflicting messages in ANT still focus on aligned interests. No connections are provided through ANT that address the actors as simultaneously being *both* the same and different. Therefore, the conflicts between competing parties simultaneously trying to claim the hashtag are rendered invisible in the framework on ANT.

In viral reality marketing, it is the content's ability to be both similar yet different simultaneously that keeps the campaign alive. As we shall see, the empirical examples point to the way something is the same *yet* different and different *yet* the same. Paying attention to this ambiguity – not *despite* conflicting interests, but *because* of them – is what allows us new insights into the driving force in such viral reality campaigns. One area where this is explicit is in potential relationships between brands. Earlier I mentioned how brands can be difficult to distinguish from each other. Sometimes they cooperate, like Blendtec and Old Spice. They may also be cooperating in the sense that a smaller brand pays the bigger one to make a reference to them, like eD-FM and Blendtec. Smaller brands may mimic the format of the bigger brands to become recognized, like Wat19.com. However, potential relationships are those that exist between brands through insinuated connections, or when brands explicitly deny a relationship to plant the idea that unofficially it exists. As we have seen between Coca Cola and Mentos, and between Pepsi and Obama these relationships are continuously mentioned; they exist through entertaining fan theories, appear in marketing experts' analyses, and they are kept alive through brands trying to undermine other brands by starting rumors.

Regardless of whether relations between brands are real or have emerged from rumors or insinuations, the reference is made, and it acts as a potential relationship. In the case of viral reality marketing, it is pivotal that we pay specific attention to the role played by potential relations, due to ambiguous stories that are potentially both true and false at the same time, and that potentially come from one brand or another. The blurred boundaries between brands, even if they do not exist from the point of view of the brand but are only suggested by someone's interaction with it, challenge what we define as relations and how we discuss them.

The following analyses take a step back from the minute details of links, tags, and individual responses to content. This means that when referenced content is mentioned, I am aware that for each piece of content there exists data of individuals who perceive those references differently. Further, there are algorithms, links, tags, and other metadata, which could also be highlighted. All of this data

exists through my fieldnotes, but is not included the coming presentations of the viral reality marketing campaigns. This lesser representation of informants and quotations is an explicit choice made in favor of highlighting the crossovers of boundaries on a larger scale than those individual participants. The data representing these stories is chosen to highlight the ambiguous relations and hence the difficulties of boundary making between different media, different professions, and genres; as well as across time between the past's potential futures and the subsequently manifested ones.

4.2.1 Library of Svendborg

The viral reality marketing campaign from Library of Svendborg contains little ambiguity and was not driven by potential outcomes discussed on social media. While these themes will come up more explicitly in the following two cases, the Library of Svendborg diverges from the others; firstly, because I was granted unique access to behind the scenes of the campaign, and secondly, because the ambiguity that was meant to generate discussion and increase momentum never reached social media. Instead, it played out internally between employees in Danish libraries. This case therefore serves to illustrate a different aspect of viral reality marketing: that of seeing what the senders see and witnessing their active work in ensuring momentum.

This case is one where I anticipated telling a story as I started doing fieldwork. I imagined having access to those who used viral reality marketing as a premise for knowing what was going on. I also imagined that only with this insider knowledge would I be able to understand how others would be motivated to pass on stories of the brand. Thus, in terms of what I expected as I was in the beginning of my fieldwork, I felt confident that I was in the perfect spot for studying a viral reality campaign. I was an insider, allowed access to those behind the campaign and provided with whatever I requested. I was treated as a guest, and my curiosity was appreciated. Data in this case is primarily based on conducting interviews with people behind the campaign, participant observation, and interviews between the press and Desiree Lenzberg, who actively drew the press's attention to the campaign. There was, however, not a lot of debate on social media as to whether the campaign was true or not. As the story reached the public there was no doubt that it was an ad, and it was made clear from the beginning that it was an ad for a library. Most of the debate and analysis of this campaign was conducted by journalists and marketing experts, discussing and relating it to earlier viral marketing campaigns.

The beginning

I got suspicious from the moment I encountered it the first time: the video featuring black and white recordings mimicking surveillance camera footage of people doing silly things in the library was uploaded to the channel ThePrincessSabine[28]. (Later two more videos appeared.) One of the clues that these recordings were obviously fake was that they did not look like real surveillance camera footage. Another was that the videos were uploaded to a brand new and otherwise empty YouTube channel, except for one other video uploaded a few days earlier entitled "My nephew", which looked like a test. A final clue was a link to a production company called Bandit Production. This led to a site with slapstick comedy. I emailed the owner of the channel and asked where she got the videos from. I got the reply:

> *Hi Filipens. [My YouTube name was FILIHOPSA; and she replied "Hi Filipens" (slang for pimple)]*
>
> *You ask how I got in possession of the videos. Well, it is an ad for libraries; I made the site and uploaded the videos. Kind regards Desiree Lenzberg, Banditproduction.*

At first, I thought she was from the ad agency, even though her reply was a mix of a professional reply and in-character reply from Sabine, the girl who in the story had uploaded the videos from the surveillance tapes.

It turned out from our first phone meeting, that she was working in the same building as the ad agency, and that she had been working on slapstick videos on a comedy character named Natural Disaster prior to the campaign for the library. She told me that she had teamed up with Tegnestuen 1 by agreeing to use her character in the videos. She was very eager to include me in the work done with the campaign, and I was immediately invited to Svendborg to meet her, Tegnestuen 1, and the employees of the Library of Svendborg. Later she sent me a newspaper article where a whole section was dedicated to the fact that a researcher from Copenhagen Business School (me) was involved in the project too. She kept me posted on all the interviews she gave and the people in the press that she had contacted. While following the woman who did intensive work to promote and defend a campaign without using professional seeders, I received internal documents and I was continuously updated on new initiatives, responses, and plans. I had access to mail exchanges, that were not publicly accessible, and I was in the thick of it, even as it happened. However, it turned out that the activities I was in the middle of were initiated and kept alive by Desiree, rather than by a variety of people

[28] http://www.youtube.com/user/ThePrincessSabine

voluntarily creating and sharing content on various social media. There was no ambiguity, as there was not much mystery in the campaign, since it was revealed immediately that it was a marketing stunt, with the Library of Svendborg behind it.

Ambiguity played out internally

Desiree and The Library of Svendborg chose not to hire a professional seeder. A seeder is a company specializing in placing the first ads publicly and ensuring and monitoring its reach. The work in placing the content according to where it will receive the most – as well as the most relevant – attention serves to ensure that the campaign gains momentum. During fieldwork I was in contact with GoViral, the biggest Danish seeders of viral content. Seeding refers to the targeted distribution of viral information in Social Networks and other media. Their work relies heavily on digital data, statistics profiling, and monitoring of content. If a company pays GoViral, it is not only a matter of highest reach, but also a matter of the specifically desired targets for the specific campaign.

Whereas the two other cases of reality marketing I studied used GoViral, Desiree and the Library of Svendborg had a much smaller budget and decided to take advantage of their own network as a local resource. Despite the fact that the campaign was for the specific library, they reached out to all libraries in Denmark and asked for their help in initiating the campaign. There were 245 public libraries in Denmark as of 2009, which could potentially result in the first 245 videos being seeded. The Library of Svendborg initiated promotion of their video by using their social media, newsletters, and other digital platforms. Along with the video they also asked for a specific text to accompany it.

> *As you know for some time the library has been plagued by disturbances. Therefore, for some time we have had surveillance cameras installed. Luckily, no serious assaults happened, nor anything else that could cause concern. But look. Lots of other interesting things happened at the library...*

One thing that separated this campaign from other viral reality marketing campaigns, was the ambiguity that acted as a driving force for such campaigns. In this case most of the uncertainties, debates and controversies played out internally amongst libraries and mostly through private email correspondences. As I had access to whatever material I requested, I had the opportunity to read these reactions that were addressed directly to Søren Lind, director of the library. These replies were similar in character to other campaign contributions in their diversity. Some found them fun, some provocative.

"I find it exceedingly difficult to see the purpose of the humor in your feature. Especially I think a statement such as "Any idiot can get a job at the library" is incredibly stupid. It seems as if you do not care about our image at all, as long as you are young with the young, but even young people presumably have a sense of quality? Actually, I just started doubting whether our project is not just a gimmick to make someone react, in the same way VisitDenmark did with Karen." Steffen Nielsen, Library of Skanderborg

Try making a video on YouTube with the title: Any idiot can become chief of marketing at the Library of Svendborg. That would be humor!!!" Kind regards, Jørn Lybech, Library of Holstebro

"Your videos are great fun. They will be included in our newsletter this Thursday." Anne Thede, Library of Frederiksberg

"How corny! Beneath standards for seriously working librarians. Let us have some more of that!!!" Kind regards, Library of Vallensbæk

There were more than 50 replies in total. The replies vary greatly in attitude and length. Some consist of fellow librarians who contacted their own network to discuss it, and then returned with feedback. Some refer to other campaigns to illustrate how this one could be improved, or what is missing for it to be in the same league as successful viral videos. Some replies turn into longer mail correspondences back and forth between the libraries and the Library of Svendborg.

Two things are important here. The first is ambiguity and the second, the lack of voluntarily participating audiences external to the library. The ambiguity and uncertainty of what this is supposed to do, and to whom the message is addressed, was there: for instance, the uncertainty of whether a campaign for the Library of Svendborg is or was supposed to be speaking for Danish libraries in general. The second related to the places where these ambiguities are. The Library of Svendborg encouraged all complaints to go directly to the library. Therefore, any comments, reactions, compliments, or protests were encouraged on a private channel of communication, i.e., replies by email, phone, or personal conversations. Therefore, each response did not generate new ones. Most discussions were taking place internally.

Two things that I noticed in this campaign were how it was not driven by uncertainty, doubts, or ambiguity, nor by people who voluntarily shared their insights with their network. It was driven by a very clever woman who made sure to engage the media. Throughout the campaign, Desiree actively tried to make the videos obligatory passage points engaging established media. Yet the very generative aspect where people discuss, debate and are invited to participate to get to know more was

absent. In the private email correspondence, we see the diversity and disagreements and interpretation of the story. But we have a case of discussion where information is not distributed to others. On social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, and Twitter, algorithms perform active work in distributing content. These digitally mediated displacements of content ensure that people are exposed and enticed to contribute, thereby fueling discussions. This is particularly effective when content is ambiguous, or pieces are missing. The case from Library of Svendborg illustrates how a case with ambiguity and potentially staged stories looks without the distribution provided by algorithms through social media. It also illustrates that ambiguity without the exposure to a heterogenous audience lacks the generative aspect where people come back again and again to add as well as to learn more. In contrast to this case, the following two cases illustrate the effects of combining ambiguity and potential relations with digitally mediated and highly distributed content.

4.2.2 Speedbandits

Speedbandits is the previously mentioned case where a journalist reported that Denmark had found new ways of creating speed awareness by using topless women to hold the speed limits signs.

Chronologically, this was the first case I studied. As I did fieldwork around this case, the VisitDenmark campaign had not yet come into being, and I had not yet had the privilege of being in the middle of a campaign as it ran. At the time I decided to study Speedbandits, the term viral *reality* marketing did not exist, or at least I was not aware of it. The concept was introduced to me as a term a year later in a newsletter from GoViral to their seeders[29] as a follow up on VisitDenmark's campaign in 2009. Until then I had simply categorized my cases as viral marketing; yet even before encountering the term viral reality marketing, I was attracted to the element of secrecy that had been part of a campaign that gained much public attention. We can rightfully question whether Speedbandits was viral reality marketing, in the sense that it did an extremely poor job in appearing to be real while staged for a Danish audience. The senders did conceal their identity, yet they did not expect to fool the people they wished to target. To the Danish audience, there was no ambiguity when it came to recognizing the video as staged. The Danish Road Safety Council granted their targets a privileged role as insiders who immediately spotted that it was a fake story. It also counted on inclusions and exclusions as mentioned in earlier examples (by being literally unbelievable). By making the story in English, appearing as if it was serious news, those who were furthest away from

[29] I worked as seeder for GoViral. They provided videos, and suggestions for additional text as well as target audiences. I was therefore positioned where I had access to ongoing campaigns and to the contexts that GoViral provided to guide their seeders.

Denmark were the ones that were most likely to believe it and be fooled. Therefore, the campaign did not betray the target audience: instead, it created a sense of community for them, in which they could be in on the joke, at the expense of those who were fooled. Furthermore, the staged news followed a scheme that was closer to humor than to real life stories, in the sense that the story seemed unrealistic; given that people were told it was a joke, they would realize that it was obviously the case. They played with a staged story but did not require people to be too emotionally invested, as was the case with the Dutch television show where people had sympathy with the kidney patients and, as we shall see later, the VisitDenmark campaign where the audience believed that a mother was really seeking the father of her child. Speedbandits played with ambiguity and allowed people to doubt and discuss. Although they managed to use language and the local awareness of Danish culture as in- and exclusion devices, not all was clear to Danes from the beginning. The Danes did not know who was behind the video from the beginning, and when they found out, a new wave of responses came.

Revealing brands after a period of secrecy and uncertainty does not bring closure to the discussion; the participants have a cleaning up job to do in terms of readjusting and reevaluating what they have been engaging with. As the brand, message, and company is revealed, that which holds together the debate shifts from being a humorous story – most likely an ad – from various potential companies to a coordinated attempt at overruling this uncertainty with specific confirmation. Potential versions of what it is about are attempted, then replaced with one specific story that tries to rewrite past events into events that were part of a campaign all along. This means that those who participated are in for another round of debate. They revise their interpretations or defend why their original interpretation was better. This is where things often start to get political. Now that it is confirmed to be from a specific brand with a specific massage attached, the debates begin on whether it is ethical, politically correct, or the best way of reaching target audiences.

At this point, the media – which had been reporting about what was on everyone's lips and the story was surrounded with uncertainty – now need to continue reporting the latest development, to contextualize what occurred. They called in experts in marketing, analysts in communication, specialists in traffic safety, experiences from similar campaigns, statistics, etc. to provide follow-ups for their readers. So even though the ambiguity supposedly was put to an end after there were no longer any hidden senders or messages, the clean-up phase caused another round of reconstructions and potentially new versions of what it was all about. For now, let us look at some of the new versions of the Speedbandits that came to life after Danish Road Safety Council revealed themselves as the

senders. Note how the campaign shifted from being a campaign for creating awareness of speeding, to one that is held together by a whole range of new obligatory passage points such as Danish culture, gender, the media, the sender, and the timing.

Campaign revealed but not ending

Shortly after it was revealed to be a campaign, the ad was shown at a traffic conference in Linköping, Sweden. In this setting, it was considered very controversial and very different from the usual campaigns for speeding awareness. (Hernadi 2007; Bröstchocken Som Får Trafikforskare Att Rasa 2007). People walked out in protest, and the media, which was present, reported on this. Media attention was rekindled. Several headlines[30] during the following days went along the lines of *"Traffic experts and researchers walk out in protest".* However, another version of the same event was given to me through an interview with Morten Hoffmann, producer and co-founder of Far from Hollywood, the ad agency that created Speedbandits. Morten's version was that one of their employees attended, and that only a few people – two or three – left the room. At the same time, he stressed that the media is a business too, and that creating an interesting story may involve exaggeration.

Stories travel geographically, but they also travel across several cultural borders. Swedes are more politically correct than Danes in many ways. This often shows in social media debates (Thelocal 2016). Swedes are more sensitive to gender issues, and they do not have the same tradition of using humor in serious matters. These are some of the differences that resulted in even more discussions of the campaign in the news media. Because the video was shown at the conference in Linköping, the director of the Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VTI) [31] submitted a formal complaint to the director of the Danish Road Safety Council, René la Cour Sell.

Helena Sederström, chief of communication at VTI said to a Danish newspaper:

> *"You could say that it got noticeably quiet in the room. We think it is unfortunate that we were not informed beforehand that the Danes would show the movie. Increasing traffic safety with the help of exposed breasts is not a method we support.*

René la Cour Sell reacts calmly to the protests:

[30] Here it is necessary to remind the reader that journalists often copy each other's news. Usually, they refer to the original article, but it is not unusual that five or six media outlets write essentially the same article about a particular newspaper stating such and such.

[31] VTI Väg- och trafikforskningsinstitutet, VTI

> *"The Swedes are puritan and politically correct. But we prefer to step on a few people's toes instead of having young people losing their toes when hit by cars […]*
>
> *My reply to the Swedish director is that of course we do not do things to portray women offensively, but to be able to reach young people with our message."*

But not all public figures in Denmark agree with the director of the Danish Road Safety Council. The head of the secretariat of the Women's Council in Denmark, Randi Theil Nielsen, directs a public critique requiring the Minister of Equal Rights to respond and act. She argues, in an interview with a newspaper, that:

> *"A public body should not spend money on having a naked woman as an eye-catcher".*

The Minister of Equal Rights replies to the newspaper, through her press secretary, that she sees no problem regarding the movie, and that she hopes it will work as intended (Toft 2009).

Ministers are required to respond, because it is communication directed at citizens sponsored by the government. The debate shifts from being about gender to being about the sender and the specific role of the receivers as citizens, not potential customers. Had it been sent from a commercial company, it would be acceptable, according to the Minister of Equal Rights.

Whereas the government in general had never financed this kind of controversial advertising, the Danish Road Safety Council had already built up a reputation for ads with humor and irony. They had a history of controversial content and strong visual devices. For instance, when using close ups of bread with red jam, while playing background sounds of traffic accidents and sirens, to invoke thoughts of both traffic jams and blood without saying it too explicitly. The Danish Road Safety Council was already known by Danish audiences for their controversial and provocative advertisements. Although as a public body they were different from advertisers targeting potential customers, the Speedbandits campaign was consistent with their earlier advertising. Therefore, when they were revealed to be the sender, most people felt less deceived, because the style matched with the source.

Julie Budtz from Danish Road Safety Council emphasized that the video was designed for the internet, which was why she did not find the naked woman offensive or inappropriate.

> *"It is not a problem that many, particularly abroad, believed the news to be real. This is exactly what makes it circulate."* (Jyllandsposten.dk 2009)

Thus, it is not about the video *per se*, but about the video designed for a specific medium; therefore criticism how it appears in political discussions and serious media can be claimed to be invalid.

These different post-revelation responses could easily be analytically elaborated on by the earlier repertoire of literature discussed in chapter one: e.g., elements such as advertising that is inherently ambiguous by nature of being online (Raula Girboveanu and Puiu 2008; Fattah 2000; Xia and Bechwati 2008), advertising that needs to be contrasted as global versus local as it travels across geographic and cultural boundaries (Barra 2009; Cintas and Sánchez 2006; Lu 2008; Mio Bryce 2010), and messages that are different when directed at potential customers as opposed to citizens (van Duivenboden and Thaens 2008; Halvorsen et al. 2005; Kristensen 2007), These analytical framings are all relevant to consider; however, I suggest that we think of these overlapping categorizations differently. Instead of using them analytically to explain what is going on, we can focus on how informants actively use them strategically to create *their* versions of what it is all about. This reveals how informants, just as the researcher, do active work in defining and ordering elements to construct specific versions of what is happening.

The campaign is continuously held together by relations and by different, sometimes conflicting, versions. When it comes to stories that spread globally but are adapted locally, the stories stay the same, only subjected to various interpretations. However, the Speedbandits campaign illustrates how nothing stays the same, and how multiple actors construct new stories by specific juxtapositions. The campaign shifts from potentially acceptable (if it is commercial) to problematic (when it is from the government to citizens). The story shifts from being offensive to acceptable with reference to the media it is designed for. Thus, the inappropriate content is not related to the video, but to the incorrect placement of the video as politicians, serious news media, and researchers include it in new contexts. Paying attention to how these different actors actively attempted to connect and disconnect, we see a complex interaction between various parties who interact out of a variety of different – sometimes conflicting – interests.

Even when feminists do not engage to create brand awareness, their engagement serves both to promote their opposing view as well as to increase awareness of the video. There are various parties that contribute with their own agendas, while at the same time, even if unintentionally, contributing to the campaign: in the campaign of the Danish Road Safety Council, feminists, politicians, and marketing experts all contribute, while still having their own agendas. Therefore, empirically, it becomes clear that we do not want to separate these analytically into those who do the branding on

the one side, and those who engage and thereby create awareness on the other. They are the same since they all ensure momentum in the brand awareness creation. They are simultaneously different since they represent various contributions that may be made in opposition to the campaign. Therefore, the stories need another perspective. We need to focus on how various interests exist simultaneously.

Similarities and differences

We have already established that designers of viral reality marketing use ambiguity strategically to encourage participation. However, ambiguity is also something the ethnographer faces, as an outcome of paying specific attention to non-human actors. Algorithms and digital infrastructures challenge how we treat the relationship between sameness and difference. The ambiguities in being both the same and yet simultaneously different can be consequences of non-human actors displacing and distorting appearances.

The Speedbandits campaign was the inspiration for the subject of my dissertation. Two years separate the campaign as it ran from the campaign I revisited as part of my fieldwork. As I started doing fieldwork, this campaign had been revealed, analyzed, and discussed in the media, yet it was no longer actively discussed. This influenced the kind of access I had. Whereas I was following "Any idiot can go to the library" while it played out, I studied Speedbandits retrospectively. So even though in both campaigns, I was granted access to those behind the scenes, and my interest in the campaign was accommodated, time made a difference between the two cases as far as accessing people's responses and reactions.

Studying Speedbandits retrospectively, two years after it had run, meant that there was limited access to data on people's immediate reactions. I was not privileged to be positioned in the middle of things as they happened. And studying things that become viral in retrospect – even if we are talking about months or weeks after they have peaked – can be exceedingly difficult: in the case of Speedbandits, blogposts were removed[32], and with them the comments posted by readers. The original video and the first few copies featuring the initial reactions from people encountering it were long gone. This video featured topless women, which rendered it subject to deletion by YouTube due to nudity. Whereas there are still plenty of instances of the video on YouTube, they are new copies. This allows "the video" to be there still, even after ten years, but the comments, tags, headlines, and additional information provided in the description of the video are different. Thus, the *same* video appears to be

[32] Many such posts showed up using Google, and when clicking on the links, either the site did not exist, or the WordPress user had closed down his or her blog. News sites were to be found, but many had been edited.

there as a resource for me to access data and make contact to the audience engaged in commenting and sharing, yet the video was different to the initial versions in terms of the reactions it represented in the comments. “The video” held together a network of people, yet over time those people as well as the comments changed. As the video got removed, so did the infrastructure that kept in place those who saw it, before it was revealed as an ad. The metadata that fed into YouTube’s algorithms, the timestamp indicating when it was posted and by whom, are different. Again, the question of from where and when one can study the video and its viewers’ reactions shifts to questions of whether a researcher can access the video, and to which version he or she engages with. When collecting data on a case that is rich in material, we need to consider to what extent researching the video at that time maps onto the video two years prior. This is one of the achievements of paying attention to the non-human actors and the work they do in keeping other actors in place. Despite the video as well as its relations shifting, it stays stable and recognizable as the same video, and helps keep up the illusion that it has been there the whole time.

This may not seem different from a more general issue of studying things in retrospect: for instance, interviewing people about the campaign gave quite a different picture than that of the comments I managed to find from its period of activity via web archives[xxxvi]. All this had to do with time passing, a matter that is not in any way unique to viral reality marketing. But in marketing campaigns that are kept alive by deliberate ambiguity and temporary versions of stories, it is particularly crucial to be aware of time and positioning in time.

The informants I interviewed knew who was behind the campaign and had had time to settle on an opinion. Many did not recall details and found it easier to talk about the campaign in terms of their present opinion, through comparing it to recent marketing stunts. This was an indication of the implications of studying controversial advertising in retrospect. The uncertainty and the surprise effect were no longer represented in the interviews, and the lack of similar cases helped the campaign to gain momentum. Thus, digital traces were removed, had been tampered with, or were blurred by time, and the informants’ memories had changed too. Yet the pertinent feature here is that the digital traces can sometimes keep the illusion alive that things are the same, have been there all along, and represent something stable, even if this is far from the case.

Therefore, we need to be aware of how data is distorted. Attention to non-human agents directs attention to the network of references in terms of metadata (e.g., the original hashtags used, the timestamps telling when the video was uploaded, and the comments that the video held together, but

that are lost as it gets deleted). Discussing the video calls for an awareness of how it is the same and how it is different. This is a concern for the researcher considering data validity but is it also an insight into the field in which the informants face such campaigns. For informants as well as ethnographers navigate in a landscape of displaced information. The ways information is ordered, removed, suggested, linked due to overlapping tags, and suggested as "recommended for you" through YouTube algorithms based on the specific users' previous activities, are useful to understand what both researchers as well as the informants face.

Different yet the same - Speedbandits vs speedbandit, & speedbandits vs speedbandits

The researcher as well as her informants actively face and deal with ambiguities. The researcher tries to draw attention to examples where one actor may appear as many or many as one. But parallel to this, there are participants who actively and strategically work to conceal these ambiguities. This happens as some participants try to monetize campaigns by deliberately manipulating homepages into appearing as the same despite differences, through typosquatting and domain takeover. Ambiguity is therefore not solely a consequence of non-human actors like hashtags that facilitate both collaboration and conflicts simultaneously. Humans, too, actively exploit ambiguities. Before proceeding it is important, once again, to position myself, due to the different accesses to data I had in the campaigns.

"The video" is often spoken of as one actor, while existing as various copies – dispersed and translated into different networks via changes of tags, headlines, and profiling. It is referred to as one video, despite being featured on different YouTube channels with different subscribers depending on which user uploaded a local copy. The next actor we need to consider is the URL. Here we question how one actor can be several actors simultaneously, but also how different actors, e.g., websites with different URLs, can be made deliberately to appear as the same.

Digital traces and their influence on data gathering make things disappear, due to broken links and content that no longer exists. Websites get deleted, and the content is no longer accessible. But websites may also change domain owners and, despite this, appear as if they are still the same. For instance, the official homepage URL speedbandits.dk is still accessible, and appears to be the site maintained by the Danish Road Safety Council. However, this is not the case: the domain has been taken over by a company that makes money from generating traffic to specific sites.

As I encountered the Speedbandits site during fieldwork, I discovered that it contained a huge number of ads. The design was the same as the original one made by Far from Hollywood[xxxvii]. Yet the ads made me suspicious, because publicly funded organizations are neither allowed nor interested in

featuring external advertising. By comparing earlier versions, I noticed that the layout and the text were the same.

The version featured on the site I visited during fieldwork introduced the campaign, and it even linked back to the Danish Road Safety Council's homepage. To the untrained eye it might look like the official site for the campaign. However, there were other featured posts on the site, about E-cigarettes (complete with an affiliate link) and a Key Account Management & Development course (also followed by a link). This illustrates the illusion that the page still exists as the same actor, despite changing from representing one business to representing another. In that sense speedbandits.dk 2007 and speedbandits.dk 2009 are different actors, yet they are held together through links pointing to the same URL, the content and layout suggesting the same sender; the audience, not paying attention to the ads, will assume that it is still the same site.

Whereas this was a domain takeover, typosquatting was another phenomenon that challenged what to include as part of the Speedbandits campaign, as another company bought the remarkably similar domain speedbandit.dk (NB: singular, not plural) [xxxviii]. This site had a huge number of posts written in a personal style by someone who recommended several sites he/she had used[xxxix]. Today the site no longer exists, but for many years both domains were regularly updated and kept active[xl]. When determining relevant similarities and differences, these ambiguities add to the challenge in studying actors in digitally mediated settings. It illustrates the complexity in dealing with an actor as fixed without dealing with what work it performs in facilitating conflicting interests. In the final viral reality marketing case, the aligned interests are pushed even further as some participate to distance themselves, and others are lured into participation on false pretenses. These kinds of alliances challenge how we consider actors engaging with the same object. Additionally, as this final case will highlight, the object they engage with changes as well. It is deliberately ambiguous: it changes over time as more information is added.

4.2.3 Danish Holiday Baby, Karen26, Danish Mother Seeking, and VisitDenmark

The first indicator of a changing object becomes clear from the naming of the campaign. As the headline suggests, this campaign went by many names. Originally GoViral entitled it "Danish Holiday Baby". Yet this title only appeared once throughout my empirical material: in the description of the video by GoViral. This description was accessible only to GoViral's seeders, who made money from publishing and distributing it. The section header contains names used to describe the campaign at different times. Whereas Speedbandits was referred to eponymously, and only occasionally as

“bikini bandits”, “Danish Holiday Baby” shifted between names. “VisitDenmark’s campaign” and “the VisitDenmark viral video” only existed after the sender was revealed. However, the campaign achieved extensive attention before it was revealed, and the name that was most frequently used before the reveal was “Danish mother seeking”. This name presumably emerged from Mindjumpers who turned the story of “a mother seeking” into a trend of making counter-replies entitled “fathers seeking”. Others, particularly in the very beginning, referred to the girl featured in the video as “Karen26”, or “Karen26DK”. These names referenced her email address, Karen26.dk@mono.net. The names and the shifts between them will be reflected throughout the story. For now, we need to go back to the point when it had not yet been revealed as an ad. At the time I encountered it, it was a video of a mother seeking the father of her child.

The video was distributed through GoViral. I worked as a seeder for them, and though I rarely posted any videos, it gave me an insight behind the scenes of the campaigns, including who was behind them, along with which countries they targeted, etc. The video was called Danish Holiday Baby. It had a question mark where brands are usually specified, and it had flags indicating the countries in which this ad would provide seeders with money for getting views. This, of course is not what people watching the video see, but illustrates which pieces of information were originally provided to accompany the video[xli]. Curiously enough, out of the very scarce information supplied by GoViral, including the one clue that this had to do with a holiday, the title “Danish Holiday Baby”, did not make it into any of the videos that were published.

The video

The video is two minutes and 34 seconds long. The camera does not move, suggesting that it is not filmed by a second party. The frame features a tiny portion of a room without many details. Sitting on a sofa is a young woman in her twenties with a baby. Behind her is a shelf and two pictures: one with a mixture of a clock and a sun, and one with some matching yellow colors and two letters A and D. There is also a pillow, but aside from that, there are no more details to catch the viewer’s attention. Below the video there is an email address and a link to a homepage where there are a few more pictures of the woman and her baby, playing and having fun.

The baby is calm and quiet, while the girl looks almost exclusively at the camera, interrupted only by a few occasional glances and smiles at the baby in her arms.

While modestly smiling she says:

> *Hi. My name is Karen and I'm from Denmark. And this here is my baby boy, his name is [laugh and smile to baby] His name is August.*
>
> *Yeah. I'm doing this video because I'm trying to find August's father. So, if you are out there and you see this, then this is for you. We met one and a half years ago when you were on vacation here in Denmark. And we met at the Custom House Bar. [pause]*
>
> *I was on my way home and I think you had lost your friends, and then we decided to go down to the water to have a drink, and [pause]*
>
> *Yeah, and this is really embarrassing but that is just more or less what I remember. I do not remember where you are from, or [pause]*
>
> *I do not even remember your name. [pause]*
>
> *I do remember, though, we were talking about Denmark and the thing we have here with "hygge" that foreign people always ask about. And that's [pause]*
>
> *Yeah, you were really nice, so I guess I decided to show you what hygge is all about, because we went back to [pause]*
>
> *We went back to my house [pause]*
>
> *And yeah [pause]*
>
> *We ended up having sex and [pause]*

The next morning when I woke up, you were gone. [pause]

It is not that I blame you for anything. And I am not crazy. Or this is not some kind of obsession that I have with you, I just really, really want to let you know that [pause]

That August is here, that he exists. [pause]

I feel I owe it to both you and to him [pause]

Yeah [pause]

And also, I want to let you know that I am not a bimbo or something like that. I know that August is yours because I have not been with anybody else since that night [pause]

Yeah, just so you know that. [pause]

I know that this is really a long shot but if you are out there and you see this, or anybody else who can help me sees this, please contact me. I will put my e-mail with this video; so, just write me. [smile]

Potentially an ad

The campaign of VisitDenmark was not planned to be part of my fieldwork. It began unexpectedly while I was already doing fieldwork on other topics. By this time, compared to most of my informants in the field, I had acquired a good intuition regarding things that were ads in disguise. I had a strong sense that this story was an ad, but no confirmation for my suspicions. Since I did not know for sure, and since I did not have access to any potential company behind it, I was left in a space of uncertainty just as my fellow participants, that is, *if* we even were participating in an ad. The uncertainty lasted only for a couple of days, but it was a highly intense period with a cacophony of voices all guessing, playing detective, making spoof videos, turning the attention into profit, and discussing what it was all about. Being positioned in the middle of things was very insightful in understanding what occurs during viral reality marketing for those exposed to it. I recognized elements that made me think it was an ad. I recognized similarities to previously encountered viral campaigns, and because of my suspicion, I cancelled all other plans and intensively began following something that potentially could be a campaign.

When I tell the story here, it is misleading to tell it as a story of a campaign for VisitDenmark, for that is not what it was at the time. As we shall see there are gaps between experiencing events as they play out and accounting for them retrospectively. When studying a phenomenon that deliberately tries to engage people by concealing information and encouraging ambiguity, the gap between different

versions needs specific attention. The story that I abruptly turned my attention to while in the field, was potentially an ad. But at the same time, to some informants, it was a story of a sincere mother reaching out. Later, it was a story that could possibly have been from a condom company. It then became an ad from VisitDenmark promoting tourism.

The VisitDenmark campaign was introduced earlier in the dissertation, but to recap: the campaign introduced Karen, a Danish mother who searched for the father of her child through a video on YouTube. The simple bullet point summary from the beginning of chapter two, however, was recycled from my conference presentations on the topic. It was a way of telling the story that has worked for me several times: it is brief, structured as a list of events that illustrate how the story gets used in many ways, while suggesting that it develops further and further away from the original story as the list of events progresses. This structure gives the reader an impression of the many actors and their various interests. In short, it has been crafted for the reader in a specific way.

The version from chapter two contains only a few handpicked events, and a specific order to let the reader know only what I needed them to know. I mention it again at this point in the text in case you need to reread or refresh your memory. All this too is a framing of the object of study. It is in- and exclusion, and a juxtaposition of elements, crafted so that a clear, comprehensible, and coherent story can be told.

This is the luxury of the reader, to have the events organized, the variations in engagements emphasized, and irrelevant or confusing details eliminated, so that everything makes sense in relation to the story in time and space. However, the neatly ordered list of events is not granted those who participate while the campaign is running. What I, as well as my informants, encountered was a video of a mother seeking the father of her child: a story that everyone talked about, analyzed, and had an opinion on. It was chaotic and enticing at the same time. My informants and I invested time, energy, and emotion, without knowing exactly what we were dealing with.

These stories are deliberate marketing stunts using ambiguity and mystery as a driving force. They are constructed such that no such official information exists. This is relevant to consider when understanding what participants were facing at the time, but for the writer and reader, it is also a reminder of the difference between telling a story in retrospect “now that we know what’s what”, as opposed to navigating with bits and pieces of information that potentially could be a viral reality campaign. Thus, this is both a single story, told here, but it is also many stories, depending on where,

when, and how it was encountered. Furthermore, it is a story that, as part of a specific marketing strategy, is deliberately made not to be told as a single story. This leaves the writer with the seemingly impossible task of telling a story that does not want to be told.

For now, the important thing is to provide the reader with awareness of the multiple positions from which this story is encountered. I will provide three ways of telling the story, three ways of ordering the empirical material centered around what happened, who became engaged and why, and finally, what they engaged with.

What happened?

As discussed in the case of Marius the giraffe, timelines are devices for sorting, for creating order and for suggesting a relation between elements. By now, it has been established that a timeline is an order created, based on specific parameters. As we have discussed, earlier algorithms too play an active role in organizing elements, defining relations, raking, and in- and excluding things, to make content accessible in a convenient way. Aware of the specific kind of story a timeline represents, while gathering data I used a specific timeline as an anchor. It was continuously updated with new information as soon as new events happened. This is a short excerpt progressing from the time the video was posted until it was first revealed to be an ad campaign.

> ***Thursday September 10th, 2009***
> 23:04 I (Stephan Bøgh-Andersen the creator of the timeline provided). -Discovers the video and tweets: "A kind of net dating - on the wrong side of date" [followed by a link to the video]
> The video is sent via GoViral, who has specialized in launching viral campaigns
> I too post the video on Facebook under the headline "for real?"
> ***Friday September 11th, 2009***
> Twitter. The first uses of #karen26 headline-markings starts appearing in Twitter posts.
> 22:32: Lively: discussions on Baby.dk
> 22:28 EB.dk: Seeks her child's father
> ***Saturday September 12th, 2009***
> On the frontpage of the paper version of E.B
> 11:48 Jp.dk:" where is my son's father?"
> 12:53 Blog. Inspirationsministeriet: New viral turns Denmark upside down
> 13:21 Facebook: Henrik Føhns' discussions regarding the video.
> 13:40 Blog, Mindjumpers: Danish mother seeking (The Father's Story) makes ironic video-reply as "the father" of the baby
> 14:02: Twitter @MortenSax reveals that it is for VisitDenmark
>
> […The rest of the timeline can be seen in the appendix[xlii]]

However, there was a 29-hour delay from when the timeline reveals VisitDenmark to be behind the campaign until the media published this information.

Even though this specific timeline suggests that it was officially known from Friday September 12, the news media kept questioning if it was a marketing stunt. It was not until the following day that the media started describing it as a campaign. By then the discussions concerned what it could potentially be a campaign for. One media outlet revealed "Karen" to be an actress named Ditte Arnth, another supplied information that Ditte Arnth did not have children in real life. It was not until the evening of September 13 that a media outlet revealed VisitDenmark to be behind the campaign.

Therefore, when embedding timelines as a device for creating order in narratives, we may see lists of events that occur, suggesting it is already known to the public that it is an ad, yet the mass media kept feeding their readers a different story.

This timeline was made in Danish and was frequently used and referred to by other media as the campaign ran. It was made and updated by a Stefan Bøgh-Andersen of Overskrift.dk[33]. Overskrift.dk had featured timelines for viral shitstorms before, and quickly spotted that the story of "Karen" had the potential to warrant live coverage and a timeline as well. As they provided services for companies by warning them about upcoming shitstorms, their coverage was also used to demonstrate how they were out in front and knew about and monitored the campaign long before it was officially known to be one.

The timeline was in the format of a blogpost. In addition, Bøgh-Andersen had turned on the blog's ping-back feature. This meant that whenever someone linked to the post, a comment would appear below the text with a link back to that site. This made it clear that many linked to this specific timeline, and therefore in addition to being a tool for me, served to create a context for informing others what was going on. The news media referred to it as well, and it served to be the closest to an overview people could get at the time.

I followed the timeline constantly from an hour after it was revealed by Morten Sax that it was a campaign by VisitDenmark. I was in dialogue with Stephan Bøgh-Andersen, and we joked about what the campaign could possibly be for. Saturday and Sunday, I sat in front of the computer all day, discussing, sharing, and analyzing the story. I took notes, a huge number of screenshots and saved

[33] A site owned by company offering online social media monitoring.

copies of homepages and videos. This was a highly intense period. I was in a state of constantly wishing I could slow down time, pause the events, be in three places at once. I wished I had more time for sorting things, while instead it felt like a cacophony of voices, pictures, and bits and pieces of information. There was little time for checking sources and facts. There were many things I needed to remember and follow up on, and often I lost track of where I encountered content. Content that was there in the morning was gone in the evening. Many links were broken, comments deleted, and references lost. Tracing things back retrospectively was often not possible.

I followed all links in real time as they were added to the timeline. I also spent a great deal of time watching "fathers' replies", which was a growing phenomenon running alongside events in this timeline. This sort of video originated from another marketing agency that made a video in which the ostensible father replied. This specific string of fathers-seeking-contributions engaged a range of people who recognized a new emerging trend and made their own creative videos featuring what a potential father's reply might have been.

Timelines present a chronology and therefore a specific order, but they also only represent what is included. From being in the field while trying to keep up with all the events, replies, and discussions going on, the elements presented in the timeline stand out as only partly covering what happened. Each new timeline event spun new discussions in blog comments, and various threads on Facebook and YouTube. For each time a link to another piece of news about the video was posted, a new thread started. Some of these threads were juxtaposed by hashtags and therefore held together. Several hashtags were in play: #DanishMotherSeeking, #MotherSeeking, #DanishKaren26, #VisitDenmark, to mention a few.

An event that is growing so exponentially, with so many potential interpretations of what is happening, simply cannot be adequately covered by a timeline. However, an awareness of the timeline as one out of many versions of what was occurring is crucial. I want to tell another version of what went on: this one takes as a starting point some of those who contributed to awareness of the campaign. It explores how and why they participated.

Who got enrolled and why?

To answer the question of who gets interested, we need to keep the analytical inclusion of both human and non-human actors. Furthermore, we need to consider getting *interested* as being connected, and not necessarily interested in participating. For instance, some brands get connected involuntarily. Yet a relation is made that includes both those who engage voluntarily and those who do not. This focus

enables us to capture alliances without, *a priori*, being concerned with why they are made. This is important because we want to highlight the ambiguity of both being engaged in the same phenomenon, and yet being so for various reasons simultaneously. By doing so, we attend to the dual side of people being connected for various reasons first, before going into the details of why.

The network around Karen expanded further as marketing experts started making connections between her story and other similar stories. The juxtaposition of this campaign to others served to provide a context for journalists and bloggers.

HuskMitNavn

A connection made both before the campaign was revealed, *and* revisited after, was a suggested similarity between the story of the mother and a stunt made by Danish artist called HuskMitNavn (RememberMyName) who wanted to create awareness about himself.

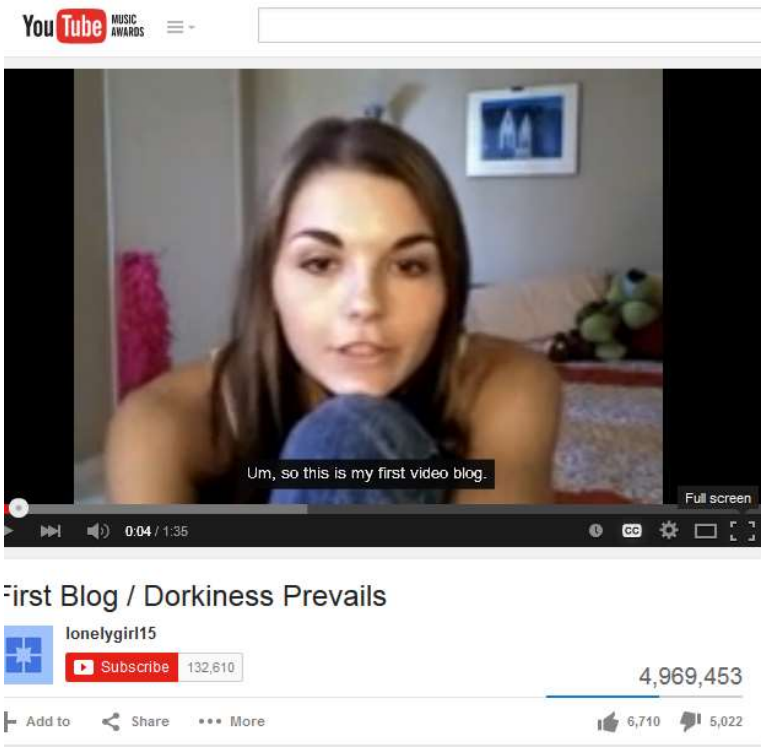
At a music festival, HuskMitNavn posted a note from Camilla to Matthias. Camilla was looking for the father of her child, conceived at last year's festival, and this year she wanted to introduce the child to his father. A specific time and place were specified at the bottom of the note. Many showed up to witness the expected encounter between Camilla and Mathias, and the artist then used the opportunity to advertise his name and work to the crowd of curious spectators.

Lonelygirl15

Another case which was suggested to be similar was that of Lonelygirl15. This similarity was suggested only after it became clear that the identity of the mother was unintentionally revealed before

VisitDenmark had publicly revealed that they were behind the campaign. At the time this case became related, all that people knew was that the mother in the video was an actress who did not have children in real life. The reference between the two women was meant as an example of how fooling people can be turned into a success, despite being unintentionally revealed.

Lonelygirl15 first came to international attention in 2006, appearing to be a "real" video blogger: Bree, a 17-year-old girl who uploaded videos where she talked about her daily life. She immediately became hugely popular on YouTube; however, everything was staged by the actress playing Bree, two filmmakers, and a former attorney. Three months into the story, keen-eyed viewers identified Bree as Jessica Rose, a 19-year-old American-New Zealander actress. She confessed, but continued posting videos, aware that people now knew her character to be fictional. Despite being later confirmed to be fictional, she attained her initial popularity by appearing to be genuine. “Bree” continued to exist and this led to several spin-offs.



Several marketing experts analyzing Karen26 pointed out Lonelygirl15 to provide a context for “Karen”.

Australian jacket

References were also made to an Australian ad from earlier that year. In January 2009, a video of an innocently looking girl searching for the owner of a jacket was uploaded. She had met him at a bar

and later that evening discovered that he had forgotten his jacket, so she made a video to try to find him.

Some days later, after massive media attention, she released a new video entitled “Are you the man in the jacket REVEALED.” In this video, she confessed that the story was a hoax. Marketing experts who drew parallels between the mother seeking the father and the girl seeking the owner of a jacket emphasized that even if ads were used to fool people, honesty in a follow up story could contribute to successful closure and to forgiveness by the audience. These connections were made after it was revealed to be a campaign for VisitDenmark, and after VisitDenmark had withdrawn the campaign and removed the video. The reference was suggested as a possible opportunity for VisitDenmark to save face and reach a successful completion.

Hey again you guys. It's me again.

Well, I guess you all know why I am posting this video – I am coming clean [pause]

Yes, I am an actress. Yes, I was employed by WITCHERYMAN, and yes, I even managed to get my face on national TV. [Smiling]

[…See full transcript: [xliii]]

Connections were made between Lonelygirl15, HuskMitNavn, Australian jacket, and Karen, yet none of these brands actively tried to become related to the story of the mother. They became related by being juxtaposed as similar. They contributed to the campaign, yet they did not to support it, and perhaps they were not even aware of the relation. Furthermore, as these campaigns were revisited after the reveal, they shifted from being compared as *similar to* to being *different from* (what was now known to be) VisitDenmark's campaign, since they featured honesty in the end.

Mindjumpers

Before the video was revealed to be an ad, Mindjumpers uploaded a video response: a story of the (obviously fake) "father" declaring that he was indeed the father and that Karen's story scared him, because if what she said was true, he could potentially have many babies by now. Twenty minutes later, the first revelation that VisitDenmark was behind the video appeared on Twitter (Mortensax

2009). Thus, Mindjumpers probably did not know for certain who made the video, but they assumed that it was an ad, and they made their response to signal that *they* were not behind it. They participated specifically to distance themselves. They took the campaign as a chance to promote themselves as experts[34] in analyzing – as well as encouraging – the debate about it. (Danish Mother Seeking – Revealed in an Hour and the next Mystery Can Start 2009; Danish Mother Seeking – What Do You Think? 2009)

Thus, Mindjumpers engaged to disengage. They used the network of actors held together by the story to hijack it and turn it into a different story about how *not* to make advertisements. *"We hope to start a debate about how Social Media can be used wisely in the future. Should you have an opinion then visit our blog*". This piece of text is still added as a layer over their video in 2021, illustrating another interesting point: when does a campaign stop? Today Mindjumpers use the reference as a case study on what not to do, and by doing so they actively contribute to the continuation of the story. Despite distancing themselves from the campaign as an unwise use of social media, they used it to position themselves as experts. They kept following up on the story as it went along, providing expert insights and analysis. They made several guesses as to who was potentially behind it.

> *"After I was interviewed by a journalist from Sydsvenskan.se, my best guess right now is FINDIZE.COM. Why? FINDIZE.COM launched their web product on the 8th of September, 2 days prior to the campaign, and 11 hours ago they opened a channel on YouTube, called Findize with the Karen26 video on it. Now from what I have picked up on Twitter, Karen26 is an old flame of someone who can confirm that she is an actress. Furthermore, the Swedish journalist who called me had sent a mail to danishkaren26@gmail.com and got a standard reply saying something like "Stay tuned to Youtube.com/user/findize for more info". Findize.com's slogan – 'Get Found – Get Findized at Findize.com'. Pretty apt for a story about a mother seeking the father of her son" (Klit Nielsen 2009)*

As they discovered that the woman was an actor, they posted the name of the actor followed by an encouragement for others to play along at guessing who was (now) behind it. (Danish Mother Seeking – What Do You Think? 2009). They suggested that it could be an ad where the actress attempted to promote herself, or a campaign from Mono.net, the site that featured her homepage. Mindjumpers

[34] Five years later Mindjumpers still refer back to the campaign, this time as a case study about a shitstorm that was not properly handled. (How to Handle a Shitstorm – Before, During and After 2014)

played an active role in engaging people to keep up the momentum, while at the same time strongly disagreeing with the execution of the presumed ad.

Mono.net

Mindjumpers, in one of their many updates as events occurred, suggested Mono.net, the site facilitating the guestbook, as the company behind it:

> *"Karen looks like a legitimate new mum, but there's no doubt that this whole thing could be a scam. It would be a fairly good way for the web hotel Mono.net to create publicity and traffic to their site. And in my opinion Karen does look a little bit like one of the partners behind Mono.net, Louise Lachman…"* (Anders Colding-Jørgensen 2009).

Mono.net was an actor who got enrolled since Grey and VisitDenmark chose to make a website using their service. However, they would also have been categorized among brands who took advantage, for they played along and turned their involuntarily involvement into awareness. They never claimed in so many words that they were behind it, but they did not deny it either. Instead, they allied themselves with non-human actors via Ad-words, (a pay per click service Google provides, where companies indicate specific keywords, and as these come up in Google searches, the ads emerge side by side with the search results).[35] This is an example of their exposure when searching on Google for "danish mother seeking"

The text in the ad says: *Do as Karen from Denmark... and make a free homepage with mono.net.* Mono.net as a potential brand behind the video existed as one version of what held the network together for a few days, as people thought it was a campaign illustrating how easy it was to find

[35] In a normal Google search, these will show up as the "sponsored links" right above the list of other links that Google has matched with your search words. Usually there are one to three sponsored links for each search.

people and get connected. Several independent marketing experts pointed towards Mono.net as the company potentially behind the video. (Anders Colding-Jørgensen 2009; Mono.Net Høster Trafik Fra Karen26 Videoen | Podii.Dk – Christian Buch Iversens Blog 2009). The message from this potential campaign was suggested as: all it takes is to set up a homepage, and your messages can reach everywhere. Even though it was later revealed that Mono.net was not behind the campaign, they took advantage of the temporary attention and their (temporarily existing) successfully executed campaign as an opportunity to promote themselves.

VisitLyngby

VisitLyngby, an organization for citizens living in the city of Lyngby, turned the story into an ad for themselves.

(I LOVE LYNGBYs profile on YouTube 2009)

After it was revealed to be from VisitDenmark, they uploaded a video in which there was a reference to the original one.

Firstly, a short clip of the original Karen-video was shown.

[Man, voice over]

We all know the story of Karen. A young strong Danish woman who seeks the father of her child. [pause]

I LOVE LYNGBY thinks that Karen searches for much more than that. [pause]

[Woman, appearing on the screen]

Hello Karen, we were thrilled to watch your video [pause]

You say you are looking the August's father, but what you are really searching for Karen, is a place to live. [pause]

For you are a strong woman who does not even need a man [pause]

[…See full transcript:[xliv]]

This video not only referred to the original video, but it also relied specifically on the audience's awareness of an interview in which the director of VisitDenmark had defended the woman as *"[...] a modern grown-up woman, who made her own decisions in life."*[xlv] It depended on the audience's knowing about and recognizing the references to the strong modern woman made in the specific interview, in order for VisitLyngby's attention hijack to make sense.

DR1 debate and its fallout

Poul Madsen, chief editor of one of Denmark's largest tabloid presses, did not participate in the campaign knowingly from the beginning. He was drawn into it believing it was a true story. His journalists had therefore continuously written about Karen as more and more information was revealed. Therefore, he was upset to discover that his journalists had been fooled, and that his paper was used in a marketing stunt without consent. Nine days after the first article was published (Rohde-Brøndum 2009), he was invited to a debate on national television together with Dorthe Kiilerich, the administrative director of VisitDenmark. (This is the interview that VisitLyngby's video refers to). The debate lasted for fourteen minutes and, as a kickoff, a marketing expert from an unaffiliated ad agency explained the concept of viral reality marketing campaigns. His stance is that this type of storytelling is a consequence of an ad-blindness where people are no longer affected by traditional ads. He describes the genre as an alternate reality game, where several realities are at play. Despite the uncertainty that the audience experiences, there is a thorough choreography for the story. It relies on advanced and refined storytelling that has a beginning, middle, and end, planned from the very beginning. In the case of Karen, he explains that we are in the middle part now. Lastly, he explains that for people to accept being drawn into it without knowing for sure what it is, it is important for

the brand to have their heart in the right place. However, as the interview progresses, the debate centers on the ethics of fooling people, and of branding Denmark based on a lie.

The day after the interview, VisitDenmark withdrew their campaign, the director was dismissed, and both VisitDenmark and the ad agency they were collaborating with remained silent.

According to the analysis provided by the marketing expert, this was the middle part of the storytelling, and an ending is still to come. His description created expectations that shaped the responses of many people, as, a few days later, the woman reappeared in a new video.

Same girl, new "baby", new ad?

A new video emerged a few days after the original was revealed to be from VisitDenmark. No explanation accompanied the video. The content was new, yet remarkably similar: the same actor, nearly the same background behind her, and the background images were new, but still featuring the same images of a sun, and the letters A and D. This time, however, the baby was replaced by a fish.

The reappearance of the actress caused people to believe that VisitDenmark had regretted its mistake and returned with a properly humorous reply. Many reposted the new video, relieved that VisitDenmark had learned from campaigns like Lonelygirl15 and the Australian Jacket, and at least showed a sense of humor. Others said that *this* time it was not VisitDenmark, it was the actress herself, illustrating that *she* had a sense of humor and dared to play along, while brilliantly distancing herself from the campaign.

For a few days, no one knew much about the new video. The words from the girl in the new video were almost identical to the ad for tourism, except for the newly defined purpose: to find a home for the fish Snæbel. Towards the end of the video, she shifts to a slightly more serious voice, while saying that in Denmark there are only 7000 of these fish left, so if anyone can help, she encourages them to do so. The video spawned new theories regarding whether she was hired to do another ad for nature conservation, while taking advantage of the already gained awareness, or if this was her own initiative to shift the focus onto something that she found important.

After yet another round of ordinary citizens, media, and blogs trying to fit this new information into the story, it becomes clear that the video was made at the behest of Anders Lund Madsen, the comedian mentioned earlier for his creative ways of promoting his talk show with a sign in India. The video was yet another stunt to advertise his show. It is a weekly entertainment show which mixes fun and silliness with serious content, the latter still presented with humor, though. Since Anders Lund Madsen had persuaded the actress to come by and tell him how it was to be at the center of massive public attention without being able to confirm or deny anything as it ran, he asked her if she could make a new version, just for entertainment. This time there was no payment involved, and she said she was in on it, because it was a great stunt. The show also featured another story that evening, regarding a threatened fish – the snæbel (a fish of genus Coregonus). Therefore, Anders Lund Madsen had suggested, that the actress sitting with a fish, would be two teasers for the price of one, and since it did not cost him anything in the first place, this cheap advertising trick became part of the story. It all fed nicely into the stream of other similar tricks he has used such as the cheap sign in India.

These are all examples of brands, individuals, artists, journalists, experts, and companies who got enrolled, some on their own initiative, some connected by others. Their motivations for being there varied greatly: some engaged to play along without requiring confirmation, some participated in the belief that it was a true story, some took the opportunity to promote themselves, and some deliberately engaged to distance themselves. They all engaged in the same viral reality marketing campaign, yet for various often conflicting reasons and with various types of commitment.

What did they engage with?

We may say that VisitDenmark's campaign is all about a video featuring a story of a woman seeking the father of her child, intended to create awareness and signal abroad that Denmark is a nice country to visit with strong independent women and lots of "hygge". But this is one out of many simultaneously existing interpretations. We may say that it is the story of the mother, a tourism ad, a

story of a strong independent woman, and a lie. The empirical material suggests that we need to extend our conceptualization of what it is that people engage with. If we cling to the relatively fixed definition of the campaign or the video as being what everyone engages with, most of the story should have stopped as soon as the video was removed, and the campaign was claimed to have been withdrawn. However, as we have seen, people were engaged with more than just a campaign and a video featuring the mother. For instance, there were more loosely related elements that, from the point of view of VisitDenmark were not related yet depended on and built upon the campaign: e.g., Mindjumpers' spoof, and the growing number of videos imitating it.

Boundary-making and ambiguity

Viral reality campaigns are made up of stories that do not want to be told, in the sense that they exist because they are different things to different people at different times. They change, and yet it is because they change, and because they are not the same from all sides to all participants that they maintain momentum. The story of the mother is a story of an actress, an independent woman, a talk show, a lie, and a steppingstone for others to promote themselves. If we fix the video analytically as an object of study, we might be able to portray the many ways in which people interpret it differently, but challenges emerge when the video is suddenly removed, after which it is no longer needed, because the story is kept alive by people who post other videos with fathers seeking mothers.

The following video replies were different. For instance:

> A Danish comedian who went on tour, did some foolish things, and now seeks the mother of his child. The baby is replaced by a Smurf. The comedian serves it beer and claims that he might need help because it turned blue.
>
> A clip from the movie Star Wars in which Darth Vader says, "I am your father", followed by five seconds of the mother sitting with the baby. Her voice is replaced with the theme from Star Wars.
>
> A Danish actor who reminds us that this is not the first time an actress has fooled people. He reveals himself as the comic actor playing Kurt Westergaard (the Danish political cartoonist who drew the drawings of Muhammed that sent Denmark into an international diplomatic crisis). He admits that he, too, was hired by VisitDenmark to play this character to promote Denmark as a liberal country where you can have a lot of *hygge* and draw whatever you want.

Hitler, in another Hitler Rants Parody, is informed that Karen, the girl he met in Copenhagen, was looking for him on YouTube[xlvi].

The Onion posts a video while informing readers that the controversial Danish film producer Lars Trier is to make a new ad for tourism in Denmark using his signature elements of drugs, rape and incest[xlvii]. The video features the text: *"Tourism officials hope the acclaimed Danish director's bleak vision of unsettling sexuality and brutal violence will attract more visitors to their country."*

What connects all these references? They are not held together by a shared video. They may be held together by a shared reference to the VisitDenmark campaign but is it not the reference but the cross-domain references that makes these contributions entertaining. Just like real time marketing, they rely on specific references across several domains such as The Smurfs, Star Wars, Hitler, and The Onion that, when put together for a short span of time, add something new to several domains simultaneously. They depend on an audience to recognize references. Even though the fathers' responses refer to the video of Karen, these depend on Mindjumpers' version of fathers responding to make sense.

Questioning what it is that people engage with in viral reality marketing campaigns raises concerns regarding boundary-making, ambiguity, and positioning. How much needs to be similar for it to be considered part of the same story? How do we treat relations that are not the same from all sides? How loosely related can elements be, while still being considered part of the campaign? Who gets to decide what is part of the campaign? These questions need to be discussed further, as they call for additional theoretical as well as and methodological concerns.

Boundary-making, potentiality, and temporal connections

Viral reality marketing consists primarily of temporarily – as well as simultaneously – coexisting, often conflicting, versions of stories: they exist momentarily. These somewhat messy collections of highly temporal and semi related content came to my attention as a direct result of the unique positioning I was granted when doing fieldwork. Even though I was provided access and time with both Far from Hollywood and GoViral when studying the Speedbandits campaign, I was positioned at a point in time where uncertainty of what was occurring was no longer reflected in the data I was able to collect. However, in the campaign of "Danish Mother Seeking", I was surrounded by uncertainty and provided with no confirmation of what it was all about. By dint of my being in the field at that exact time, when the situation was highly ambiguous, the concepts of potential futures

and expectations emerged as a logical result. Being positioned in the middle of a viral reality campaign as it happened, I became aware of how difficult it can be to order messy, inconsistent, confusing, and contradictory data. Decisions on what to include, and which elements to consider part of the campaign, were often difficult. Furthermore, informants disagreed on whether specific references were relevant parts of the campaign or not, depending on whether they recognized the specific domains that references combined. I, too, missed references such as the Hitler parody before becoming familiar with the specific domain, and surely more references were lost when made in domains that I was not familiar with. These concerns add to the awareness of complexities in boundary-making. Positioning, even at the point in time where everything happened at once, was not adequate to ensure that I did not miss references. Neither did it ensure that I was able to be in the right places, as cross-references did not play out solely on specific platforms where I could position myself. They appeared across domains and were impossible to predict beforehand.

The temporarily existing versions of what was happening, and the continuous connections made between brands, events, and memes, played a huge role in ensuring momentum. If we only look for shared interests, or groups of users and producers, then we cannot even perceive these brief and temporary connections between people connected through:

- a VisitDenmark video, an interview, and VisitLyngby;
- Lars von Trier, The Onion, and VisitDenmark;
- VisitDenmark, an actress, a threatened fish, a talk show and a comedian;
- Marius the giraffe, Top Gear, and Countryball;
- Carlsberg's tradition of making real time marketing, a storm, a new Danish tradition of naming storms, Frederik, the Crown Prince of Denmark who crossed a bridge that was closed due to the storm.

Such "groups" are inherently *ad hoc*, coming into existence through specific combinations of time and references.

4.3 Issues and challenges

In the case of VisitDenmark, I initially centered the story around three overall questions. They were : what happened, who got enrolled and why, and what did they engage in? Whereas the questions are generic and simple, it is the specific reason *why* these questions are difficult to answer when it comes

to viral reality marketing campaigns, that is particularly interesting. Once again, we need to revisit these questions while collating the empirical material presented in this chapter with the previously discussed theoretical frameworks. Collating the theoretical approaches to innovation, actors, and relations, with the empirical examples of viral reality marketing brings forth new issues, problems, and challenges.

Theoretically, the empirical material calls upon news ways of conceptualizing something that is held together by many actors/actants simultaneously while engaged with by many, for many different reasons. Through revisiting and contemplating the two questions: who got enrolled and why and what they engaged with, I will first signal needs for new theoretical concepts. I will then take up ambiguity and its challenges when it comes to methodologically addressing something that is made deliberately ambiguous. The question that asks what happened may always leave gaps between what was encountered in the past and how it is later represented retrospectively. Yet the deliberate ambiguity that is the very driving force in viral reality marketing further challenges telling a story in retrospect.

4.3.1 Temporarily and loosely connected, multiple agendas, ambiguous content, and potentials

Those who get enrolled may be part of the same campaign, but they are not necessarily connected through communities, and they do not know each other. They are loosely and highly temporarily connected through specific content and references. Often, they do not have interests that are directly aligned with the brand. Despite supporting the brand by ensuring its momentum, they act out of their own interests with their own often conflicting agendas in mind. They may act out of opposition and resistance thereby engaging to disengage. They may be competing brands attempting to hijack attention and direct it to themselves. Therefore, collaboration must be revisited theoretically to address how participation in campaigns can both contribute and oppose at the same time.

But not only those who engage are difficult to grasp analytically. What they engage with is equally difficult to capture. Trying to pinpoint what the participants agree on is challenged by the way they all refer to different explanations regarding "what it is all about". They do not just label it differently, such as "entertainment", "a true story", "an ad"; they actively try to convince others of *their* version. Therefore, the participants are held together by different versions such as true stories, potential ads, and confirmed marketing stunts. In time their versions change too as more information is added. There are simultaneous versions, coexisting, running in different timelines that do not map onto the actual time of publishing. These different positions generate further discussion and uncertainty as

participants are positioned differently, both when it comes to what they consider part of the story and what they have so far come to know.

But the inconsistencies and frictions between different coexisting versions, are not just a result of a story shared by many with differing knowledge and interpretations. Nor are the different versions simply a result of the non-human actors or the digitally mediated setting distorting and displacing them. The ambiguity is not an outcome of studying something complex. Ambiguity is a *deliberate* strategy to keep participants engaged. Inconsistencies and friction are also results of deliberate choices by the campaign designers in order to engage the audience. Ambiguity becomes the force holding participants and elements together, thus allowing the campaign to grow.

Viral reality marketing campaigns raises new challenges because the "who", "why", and "what", are all analytically challenging to grasp. Those who engage are loosely connected, they have various, often conflicting agendas, and the setting in which their references make sense is highly temporal. What they engage with is ambiguous and it is the absence of confirmation and the temporal potential versions that keeps it stable.

If we relate this to actor-network theory and particularly to the model of translation, we have a fact-builder who manages to create an obligatory passage point successfully enough to enroll others, and where all participation is considered a result of shared interests. There are no distinctions between users and producers. They are analytically treated as actors despite whether they make campaigns or participate in others' campaigns. The shared interest in a common obligatory passage point is what connects them. However, those who participate out of protest, or with the intent to hijack attention and to keep--yet redefine-- the passage point, is not analytically visible.

We have already seen how multiple acters contribute. Some participate to promote themselves and some to distance themselves from these various connections. Some *become* related as they actively relate themselves, others *get* related through comparisons, juxtapositions, and analysis. But those who enroll themselves and those enrolled by others are different unless seen through ANT. If we analytically treat these connections as valid connections while removing motivation, we see how both matter. Even though neither Australian jacket nor VisitDenmark have made the connection between the two, the connection has been made. Just as the connections between Pepsi and Obama exist. ANT provides a framework that is oriented towards relations as they are made. It treats those who participate, and what they participate with as equal. It includes connections while disregarding

intentions. It does not distinguish between whether a brand participates to promote or hijack attention; it directs attention to the relation that is made.

Where ANT may allow us to highlight a range of actors that are both human and non-human, while highlighting the interplay between these, the deliberate ambiguity requires different analytical tools if we are to capture these dynamics. Informants participate both in creating awareness while at the same time, they participate for conflicting reasons. For instance, some are not aware, some do not care, some use the campaign as steppingstone for their brand promotion, and some participate specifically to object.

The specific reason why the question "who got enrolled and why" is difficult to answer is because people who contribute to creating awareness do not necessarily consider their actions to constitute a contribution. They may participate only to promote themselves; they may do so out of protest; they may do it unknowingly. Therefore, we need to shift from dividing the actors into producers, defined as those who want others to promote their brand, on the one hand, and users, defined as participants engaging with the brand, on the other hand. ANT provides a framework that includes relations irrespective of the number of agendas, as it emphasizes only those relations. Therefore, ANT provides an interesting way of mapping who gets enrolled as well as what they engage in. The 'why' is simply assumed to be sufficiently similar interest. Empirically, however, it becomes clear how some actors are both similar, yet different, simultaneously. Additionally, it becomes clear that interests in participation may hold conflicts, as people may participate to betray or convert what an actor represents. ANT does not cover these ambiguities in actors and relations. Thus, we need to conceptualize ambiguity differently.

4.3.2 Ambiguity and the shifting positions in time and space

Events are dispersed in time, asynchronously and between otherwise unconnected people. Timestamps indicating the time of initial digital appearance do not reflect the time that content is encountered. This is an important observation since informants still spoke of the mother as if she were real, despite the already published information that she was an actress featured in a campaign of VisitDenmark. Such differences between actual publishing of information and its specific reach to informants created frictions that spurred discussions among participants.

When a story is accounted for according to timestamps, this reconfigures elements, as some elements may exist early in the account, while only at a later point in time become relevant to the story. We have seen this with the retrospective reference to a Zenvo igniting, Lonely girl15, HuskMitNavn, Are

you the man in the jacket, and Rokokoposten. This illustrates that stories are encountered in a different order. Further, there is also a temporality that enables connections to be obvious at certain points in time, while diminishing as time passes. For instance, the short time span in which everyone thinks about a specific football player when hearing the word bite makes some references obvious as they are made but may require additional explanation at a later point in time.

The analytical framing of innovations in-the-making in diffusion theory seemingly supports the work of retrospective accounting for what went on because it fixes innovation. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the reason for this is that the innovation is *analytically constructed* as a starting point for the analysis. The campaign coming into being is not the outcome of the occurred events. It is produced by the narrator to account for an already, analytically existing phenomena. Actor-network theory on the other hand abandons the concept of innovation as privileged. Any actor continually makes and breaks connections. Therefore, the innovation is temporary and fragile. It exists in a present, always in-the-making, and only through a network of others who actively stabilize it through alliances. However, when it comes to relations between elements that change while keeping some relations intact, the framework of actor-network theory does not deal with ambiguities. It is concerned with how an actor, like the message of Denmark as a nice place for tourists to come, travels from one version to another: a video of a mother, to a video of a father, to a growing number of other videos of fathers, to a video featuring a woman speaking as an actress. Yet the message that Denmark is a nice place to visit is both part of the *same* from one side (a campaign for VisitDenmark), and at the same time different things: Mindjumpers attempt to distance themselves, various comedians, and bloggers' opportunities to create real time entertainment, the actress's opportunity to feature herself, a talk show host's opportunity to promote his show etc. Viral reality marketing campaigns feature a high degree of content that is between parties but not the same from all sites simultaneously. ANT does not have concepts for capturing these nuances.

Boundary-making is a challenge because it is simultaneously the same thing that people engage in, yet different. What happened, and what was part of the story, changed as well. The story of the mother was once potentially an ad for condoms, at another point a campaign for tourism. Telling what happened calls for consideration of how both stories existed at different times. Telling the story of what happened further requires accounting for the relation between these different temporarily existing versions. Telling of the story without making this ambiguity invisible, requires awareness of how to tell the story and what to include as relevant. Thus, telling a story of what happened requires

elaboration of what happened to whom and when. In viral reality marketing these inconsistencies constitute a crucial part of the story.

Telling a story of what happened, requires prerequisites in creating successful memes: it requires that the audience knows a repertoire of the references for them to appreciate it. Likewise, the researcher trying to convey in writing the complex reference-making across media must make present such prerequisites as well. For instance, to account for how references go back and forth between Hitler and The Cleveland Show, the narrator must go back and forth in time, while jumping between different contexts, to tell a story that illustrates the beauty of these brands and the beauty of these references from both sides.

Likewise, telling a story of what happened, requires the narrator enacting a specific order. This is done by reordering and rearranging elements for the story to makes sense to the reader positioned externally to what went on. There is invisible work in recreating past networks. The researcher, who attempts to transport temporarily entertaining references into the context of a linear written account, to readers who were not there in time, and who did not share awareness of the specific domains the references came from, performs work in accounting for what happened. Providing answers to what happened therefore becomes a task of rearranging elements to give the reader a sense of coherence.

4.3.3 The shifting position of the researcher

The discussion in this chapter, of being where a campaign has not yet been confirmed, has directed attention to the positioning of the researcher. It is a privileged position for the researcher to experience the same uncertainties as the informants and encounter ambiguous stories as they play out instead of studying them retrospectively. Yet it is also a reminder of the shifting position of the researcher in the field, where things are still uncertain, and of the writer trying to account for what went on at a later point in time, where they may be confirmed or altered due to the course of time.

In the beginning of the VisitDenmark case, I was positioned in the middle of things as the campaign ran. This meant that as an **ethnographer** doing fieldwork, I encountered the campaign *before* it became confirmed as such. My positioning was the same as my fellow participants. We were involved in something that was not yet a campaign, although it had the features and potential for being one. Together we tried to make connections and create order to understand what was going on. The ambiguity held us together due to uncertainties and potentialities.

Our attempts to create order and coherence were directly opposite to the campaign designers' attempts. As their campaign grew, the more ambiguous it became. The ambiguities and uncertainties deliberately chosen to encourage new stories, theories, and competing interpretations, were both what ensured growth in awareness, while at the same time the biggest challenges for the ethnographer trying to get a grasp of what it was.

In the position of a **writer,** accounting for what had happened, I faced a different challenge. What appeared ambiguous when in the field had often settled when looking back at it. Most things in viral reality marketing campaigns are highly temporary. Therefore, as time passed, references that were so obvious while in the field vanished or became less obvious when writing about them retrospectively. Many potential outcomes depended on an absence of a confirmed brand. As the brand got revealed, the story shifted. The expectations to potential outcomes of the stories and potential ads that existed in the field, had been exchanged for confirmed stories and publicly claimed ads, when I was writing about them retrospectively. Therefore, as a writer I tried to bring into the story the incoherence, the multiple stories and the potential outcomes that kept the campaign alive. This conflicted with the campaign designers' version of what had been going on. They tried to order the story as well. They tried to retell it as if had been about their specific brand all along.

Thus, as an ethnographer I tried to delimit ambiguity while campaign designers encouraged it, while as a writer, I embraced and tried to highlight the ambiguity, while the designers tried to delimit it and reduce all the mess into a matter of a single campaign with a clear message. I faced a methodological challenge in being aware of, and accounting for, my shifting positions as well as those who also try to tell the story simultaneously. Telling a story of what happened requires awareness of shifts between the ethnographer's position in the middle of things and the writer's position when accounting retrospectively. But it also reminds us that telling the story is a joint venture of informants, campaign designers and researcher. Furthermore, the writer trying to address the question of what happened, directs attention backwards, whereas the ethnographer and the informant in the field address a "what happens" that directs attention forward, into potential futures. Awareness of such shifts and what objects they each construct, is an insight into studying campaigns that grow because they change.

Summing up, three areas have been emphasized until now. First, what holds the campaign together changes and is ambiguous. Those who engage do so for various conflicting reasons. The writer, accounting for it, must contemplate how to speak of what happened as she shifts positions, while also accounting for the way stories are simultaneously told by many.

In the following chapter I will provide new ways of approaching these areas.

5. Making boundaries, telling stories, shaping worlds

5.1 An exercise in ordering

In viral reality marketing, we are dealing with temporary, ad hoc, fleeting relations. Interactions are digitally mediated and thereby both easily distributed as well as distorted. They come abruptly into existence and are short-lived and highly un-orchestrated. While such campaigns play out, they are omnipresent, yet simply cease to be soon after. People forget about them, as data representing the discussions and theories is removed or downranked by algorithms in favor of new trending content. Despite the uncomfortable position of the ethnographer being in an unpredictable, cacophonous mess, where the outcome, extent, and consequences are unclear, it is both possible and extremely crucial to study such phenomena.

Placing oneself in the thick of it becomes essential as more and more trends and movements originate and grow through social media. Capturing and understanding the muddled state of the world, where "local" no longer simply refers to physical distance, is therefore even more relevant today. But how can this be done? This study of viral reality marketing illustrates new insights, when the researcher is embedded in the object of study, i.e., the events unfolding. It explores not only the messy object of study, but also the researcher's shifting positions, thereby pinpointing specific areas to which researchers studying temporary digitally mediated, and dispersed interactions, must pay special attention.

5.1.1 New questions arise

When you, the reader of this dissertation, read this document – organized with examples, analysis, and references – it is the result of an extensive process of in- and exclusions. The work is carefully structured to give a particular understanding of the relationships between viral reality marketing, ambiguity, temporality, analytical concerns, and methodological considerations. It is also the result of choices about what to explain and what to assume as basic knowledge for the reader. It is an acrobatic act of telling what went on in highly intensive settings, while only handpicking a few examples to represent it. Prior to this, before putting together the actual document, it was a process of finding suitable conceptual frames of mind to bring into the field; it was active work to enter the field, consisting of continuous contemplation of different terms and concepts, as well as translation of these terms into useful questions to informants, and iteratively revising everything as required. Practical decisions regarding what pieces of information to save as screenshots were taken – in retrospect, sometimes too few. Throughout the process of creating this dissertation I have put effort

into determining what kinds of information to write down, how to engage and interact with informants, and how to proceed when discrepancies between informants and the imagined project surfaced. The topic of this chapter is how the document you hold came into being, as well as the kinds of work, boundary-making, considerations, and choices that went before it. The questions that will be discussed can be divided into three different types of concerns:

How is it possible for the ethnographer in the field to **study** and conceptualize the highly fragmented and temporary fleeting connections that are everywhere at once, before vanishing just as suddenly as they came into being? Where can the researcher position herself? What should she be looking for? And how does her specific access influence the object of study she is able to grasp and represent?

How, and in what terms, can the researcher **analyze** what is going on, while capturing the ambiguities, incoherence, and conflicts surrounding viral reality campaigns, as well as the cacophony of voices and activities generated by them?

What concerns are there when the researcher attempts to **write** about ambiguous incoherent events, in retrospect, in ways that make the temporal connections, unpredictability, controversies and inconsistencies visible, without explaining them away in a simplified, coherent account?

These main concerns will be pivotal throughout the chapter.

Performing fieldwork results in data that is then processed: categorized, analyzed, interpreted, and presented. Here, a specific focus on different modes of ordering will be provided both while data is collected in the field, as well as when it is analyzed and subsequently converted into a written narrative of the events. These three domains (collection, analysis, and presentation), with their varying requirements and challenges regarding ordering, overlap and influence each other. Discussing modes of ordering across all three highlights challenges that occur when studying ambiguous events and emphasizes the work that must be actively performed. Whereas this is always a matter that researchers must be concerned with, the methodological concerns are highly relevant when studying a phenomenon that shifts from being potential, to various ambiguous versions of stories, to finally being accompanied by a specific brand and message that attempts to rewrite what it was all about in retrospect. These shifts, unique to a phenomenon that strategically uses ambiguity to create brand awareness, emphasize the need for the researcher to contemplate the various positions she is in.

5.2 Temporality and potentiality

The difference between studying a campaign retrospectively, versus being in the middle of things as they play out, directs attention to the non-human actors that play crucial roles in the ability to access data, not only when time has passed, but also while massive amounts of data are being generated simultaneously and ubiquitously across digital platforms, and disappearing just as suddenly as they appeared. In the following sections, temporality and potentiality will be discussed through two types of orientation the researcher can deploy: one of the present and one of futures. Both orientations represent modes of ordering data useful to the ethnographer doing fieldwork. I will then discuss the concept of modes of ordering. The researcher shifting position from fieldworker to analyst and writer will be a recurring theme.

5.2.1 Actor-network theory - orientation towards presents

Communication studies highlight influencers as groups relevant to pinpoint in Word of Mouth (Carl 2008; Griggs and Freilich 2017; Katz and Lazarsfeld 2005). They are assumed to have higher influence on a brand by reaching more people. It may not be the same influencers from case to case, but their role in supplying momentum to the campaign is both predefined and crucial.

As we have seen we need to approach the role of influencers and communities differently. Empirically they may manage to establish themselves as obligatory passage points or as actors strong enough to speak on behalf of many others, but these cannot be pinpointed prior to the campaign. As viral reality marketing campaigns are ad hoc, the connections and the directions in which the debates go are unpredictable. Therefore, the identities of the people who play these influential roles and the connections between content that is made is not a given beforehand.

When using ANT as a frame of explanation, concepts such as communities, users, producers, and online interactions, as well as innovations, are not above the data collected, and can therefore not be used as explanatory factors. On the contrary, any relation must be explained and accounted for. The aim of ANT is to highlight correlations and associations that might otherwise be invisible or preconstructed through categorization. The power, Latour emphasizes, lies in providing connections among unrelated elements, as well as in showing how one element holds many others (Latour 1996:8). The ability of ANT to resist a priori constructions allows for otherwise seemingly miniscule actors to become significant. Analytically, being able to see this distinction is an achievement of having framed actors as neither major nor minor *ab initio,* or the innovation as something that existed initially, independently of those who encountered it (Rogers 2003). ANT does not deny that some actors play

a larger role or influence a great many others, but they come into being through continuous alliances. And they depend on others to be stabilized, temporarily, as such. Using ANT as a mode of ordering data while in the field, we avoid treating concepts such as influencers, communities, and people in important positions in relation to the innovations as pre-existing entities. The boundary-making done by bringing presumed orderings such as users, influencers, or innovations into the field may analytically, and unintentionally, create boundaries that order data according to them, thereby becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy of how the world works. The benefit of insisting on connections without analytically taking influencers or innovations as a starting point, is that the researcher then focuses on unexpected connections, as they come into being, instead of locating pre-defined connections. This makes ANT a highly useful tool to map connections in the present as they occur. When the ethnographer is positioned in the middle of something that is dispersed across domains and not yet confirmed, ANT provides an orientation that disregards assumptions of obvious places, groups, and objects. It prevents a priori filtering and allows the ethnographer to grasp the temporary interactions as they happen.

5.3.2 Expectation studies - future orientation

Whereas ANT is useful in ordering an intensive and temporal phenomenon with multiple actors because of its abilities to map the connections, as they are made, it is not concerned with the future. ANT does not deal with causality; therefore, actions and the consequences they have, are only relevant in this framework when, and if, they happen. However, a present where people struggle to make, connect, and deconstruct elements, in order to come closer to what is going on, generates a lot of potential outcomes. In their attempt to shed light on *what* they are engaging in, people exchange opinions and play detective, thereby generating new references. Subsequently, these new references give rise to new potential outcomes, which in turn generate more curiosity and spur increased participation. The driving force of the campaign is the continuous addition of new elements to the story. Expectations and temporary potential outcomes are essential parts of viral reality marketing. Therefore, another analytical concept in need of attention is future orientation.

Stories that simultaneously hold together questions regarding the potential existence and identity of brands behind them, and the possible messages they contain, generate expectations. This directs attention to a shift from what is in the present, to what exists in that present as a temporary future. Potential future outcomes are the driving forces in viral reality marketing. Expectations make way for, as well as encourage, new stories. Therefore, the relationships between the present and the

temporarily existing futures in that present, need more attention. Analytically, we need to look forward, to see how a version shapes the way future versions *can* be.

Recent studies of expectation and foresights point to the performative role of expectations and plans[36]. They highlight that, when breaking away from promises and futures created by expectations and plans, extra work is necessary compared to simply translating one's action according to the pre-existing expectations and plans. Thus, expectations construct potential futures which, despite never materializing, play a role in the present. One can speak of multiple potential futures, and their tendency can be contested in the present, despite minimizing their importance when analyzed retrospectively, as a materialized future is then known.

The concept of contested futures is introduced in a book by the same name (Brown, Webster, and Rappert 2000). Here, Brown et al. elaborate on a variety of studies of innovation processes, focusing on the various potential futures that exist in the present, as well as the role such contested futures play in constraining and enabling specific developments. The overall aim of the contributions in the book is to shift the focus from looking *into* the future to looking *at* it. This means exploring the future as a temporal abstraction, thereby exploring how it is constructed, by whom it is managed, and under which conditions (Brown, Webster, and Rappert 2000:4). In this framework they elaborate on how the future is actively created in the present through contested claims and counterclaims over its potential. (Brown, Webster, and Rappert 2000:5). In contrast to other similar studies, the contributions in this book all emphasize that the concept of contested futures does not postulate the probability of one future versus another, nor does it attempt to generate normative descriptions about specific futures. Instead, the analytical gaze is focused on the phenomenon of future orientation. The focus is not the future per se, but the real time activities of actors utilizing a range of different resources with which to create direction or convince others of what the future will bring. This analytical shift is a useful tool while in the field, studying intensely orchestrated events involving a high degree of uncertainty and multiple competing contributors. In viral reality marketing – or any field where the ethnographer faces conflicting lines of story development – anticipation of many

[36] Plans have played an important role in studies of computer software development, in dealing with the difference between intentions embedded in software and outcomes in actual use. More discussions of this can be found in CSCW (Computer Supported Cooperative Work which emphasizes how different kinds of plans may provide different kinds of resources, such as maps or scripts (Schmidt 1999), and which explicitly focuses on how plans are used in action (Bardram 1997; Rönkkö, Dittrich, and Randall 2005). Worth mentioning here is Lucy Suchman's distinction between plans and situated action (Suchman 1995): Plans do not determine situated action but are resources for it. However, concomitant effort is required to deviate from such plans.

potential outcomes result. Trying to rephrase questions and focus on what, if only temporarily, is the expected future, allows for a different understanding of what is going on. It embraces the ambiguity and uncertainty that is deliberately encouraged by such a campaign. Instead of trying to know more about what is going on, one can rephrase questions, and increase curiosity about the various theories and explanations.

Performative role

Futures, *in posse* if not *in esse*, play an important role. In their study of nanotubes as seen from the perspective of research groups, society, and technological fields, van Merkerk and Van Lente introduce the concept of emerging irreversibilities. In doing so, they center their focus on the process by which fluidity and open-endedness are decreased, due to expectations based on the potential futures existing for the nanotubes (van Merkerk and van Lente 2005). These emerging irreversibilities are what constrain, as well as enable, lines of action, thereby having an impact on the future by formulating a range of expectations. In defining the concept, they write that *"emerging irreversibilities make it more difficult (or less easy) for actors to do something else (or easier to do something)"* (van Merkerk and van Lente 2005:1096). This means that actors experience more, or less, resistance for different options they try to explore and develop. These constraints or incentives stem from options that become more dominant over others and subsequently, a technological path emerges. However, van Merkerk and van Lente's explicit goal is to show how such irreversibilities must be located while in the field instead of being constructed, or justified by a narrative rhetoric, retrospectively.

Wilkie and Michael also refer to the concept of irreversibilities. They emphasize the role users play in documents before technologies meet the actual users, an example of such irreversibilities. This role creates an expectation of the future users that then justifies choices made concerning the technology (Wilkie and Michael 2009). Thus, the document has a double role both in making plans for what the users' role *will* be, as well as delineating what those roles *can* be.

Expectation is another concept that helps the researcher towards a future orientation. According to Brown and Michael, in their paper entitled "A Sociology of Expectations: Retrospecting Prospects and Prospecting Retrospects", expectations are not only interesting insofar as they shape potential futures by guiding choices of action, but also because they shape new expectations of futures as the old ones expire, disappoint, or fail to be realized (Michael and Brown 2010). For instance, expectations of specific futures often fail while still having an impact on what is to be expected next.

Sometimes expectations not only affect boundaries for future actions, but also provide boundaries and incentives for new constructions of futures.

Brown and Michael argue that significant patterns can be observed when we compare real-time current expectations with memories of former expectations. Such changing expectations can be understood in two distinguishable ways by which people interpret expectations and change.

> *"The first of these 'interpretative registers' refers to the way the future was once represented, as distinct from the way it is currently represented. This process of recollecting past futures we have called Retrospecting Prospects, or people's memories of the future. The second register refers to what people do in the present with these recollections. That is, the uses that people have for these memories by redeploying them to manage or engage with the future. This second activity we have called Prospecting Retrospects, whereby past futures are incorporated into the real-time constructions of future presents" (Michael and Brown 2010:3)*

Their focus in on how past futures shape present ones. This becomes relevant when expectations are used strategically. The "sociology of expectations" approach is interesting as a supplement to ANT, as it provides a focus that encompasses cuts that were previously made in networks. It allows us to consider the relation between a future that once was, and the future as it is constructed now. In doing so, it highlights alliances that were once made, but are later rendered irrelevant, or are replaced with new ones. Even though these connections are not directly part of the current picture, the remnants of their influences might still be. Therefore, these analytical resources enable us to highlight the defunct potential futures that served to create momentum for campaigns, even if the expected futures never materialized. ANT indirectly includes future orientation through scripting and mobilization. However, a failed network is no longer a network; therefore, in retrospect, it is no longer perceptible even if it facilitates a new network. The emphasis on potentiality is a reminder of the benefits of looking at the future from the present while in the field, and keeping this specific future, even if temporary or later replaced by another, in mind. It also reminds us to contemplate how to account for it later.

Summary

Expectations are a two-edged sword in the sense that they are used strategically. First, expectations are the driving force: as long as people stay curious for new knowledge about the source of the story, the purpose is served. They will keep engaging and exchanging opinions and theories. This leaves

room for flexibility, and it gives a voice to the people involved. Second, as this chapter's theoretical discussion illustrates, there are risks involved in using expectations strategically, as they are constitutive, thereby effecting *and* affecting possible future outcomes. Expectations not only motivate people to act, their interpretation of the outcome may also depend on those prior expectations. For this reason, the variety of possible future outcomes might make it difficult for campaign creators to transform the attention gained into a specific outcome.

Expectations have a performative effect in creating a prerequisite for what is going to happen. They act as driving forces, as the absence of confirmation calls for people to make up their own theories about what they are experiencing. Paying attention to the role of expectations also calls for consideration of how the multitudes of expectations are managed strategically and by whom. And finally, temporality touches on the specific challenge of telling, in retrospect, about events that occurred, that were made and recognized, without rendering important potential futures invisible as a consequence of turning it into a linear coherent story.

5.2.1 Modes of ordering are entwined and nonlinear

John Law, in his book *Organizing Modernity: Social Ordering and Social Theory*, emphasizes how getting from empirical data to the final analytical product is a process with several modes of ordering:

> *"[E]thnography is an exercise in ordering. And that ordering involves interacting before, during and after the process of fieldwork"* (Law 1993:43)

Gaining access is the first example of a situation in which an ordering must take place. This implies contacting the right people, assembling elements of the project relevant to those who decide if they will grant you access, and convincing people that a particular kind of presence is required to conduct the study. This work is one of ordering bits and pieces to create the possibility of a project (Law 1993:35). But there is more to ordering than preparation before being allowed to enter buildings, attend meetings and be in positions where knowledge can be accessed and obtained. As soon as one is granted entrance, there is the question of where to go, where to locate the action and how to make sure to become part of it. Thus, the question of when access is gained is not always easily separated into *before* and *during*. This means that it is both something that must be done before entering the field, and yet also raises the question of when, and whether, the field can be said to be sufficiently entered. Thus, gaining access *before* fieldwork is not a stand-alone task inseparable from gathering data and engaging in the field *during* fieldwork. Choices at one level affect the choices available at the next level. Furthermore, once having gained access, research permissions, as well as promises

made as to future contributions deriving from the research, will later stand as actors from the past. The researcher will thus insure that, as more data is added, the project still has connections back to these earlier agreements. Therefore, as the project progresses, no matter the outcome, links between what was agreed, and what has occurred, will need to be made. The ordering from *before* will have influence on the analysis made *after*. Similarly, questioning informants in the field creates a specific awareness about the project, which makes later questions seem plausible, if not inevitable. Informants may find these later questions confusing, disturbing, or perhaps divergent from what the researcher originally was assumed to be interested in. Such relations between *before*, *during* and *after* are important, since they are the first indicators that something is going on between, as well as across, different modes of ordering bits and pieces.

Thus, from the point of view of writing up the research, earlier pasts (*before*, when preparing to get access), later pasts (*during*, when locating the action in the field), and present (*after*, when presenting earlier events, considering what is now known) allow for different kinds of concerns when it comes to ordering, and these concerns are often entwined.

5.2.2 Ordering in the field

The privilege of defining an order, Law continues, is one that the researcher in the field shares with his or her informants. The field contains multiple, simultaneous orderings. Multiple actors are connected through various networks, each carrying different notions of what the lab, the work, or the research project is. This allows Law to recall a previous concern he had, while in the field: *"where the ethnographer is, the action is not"* (Law 1993:45). In his earlier narrative about being in the field, Law had the feeling that wherever he was, people were talking about other events and meetings. Whenever he was in one place, he was missing out on something going on somewhere else. It was impossible to order bits and pieces by placing oneself where the action was, because doing so instantly raised questions about the boundaries of the action as well as of the object of study. Many of these concerns were in play throughout my process of turning research questions into fieldwork and subsequently into a dissertation.

5.2.3 Ordering through writing

"Writing is work, ordering work", Law states in his chapter on networks and places (Law 1993:31). But what happens when an author moves from a single voice to several, he asks. Along these lines one could further ask: how many can we give voice to? What criteria should guide us? Does giving voice to some over others carry consequences in concealing relevant pasts? These are but some of the

questions one can ask after having read Law's considerations. Prioritizing some voices over others is a privilege of the narrator who constructs a specific reality. Any narrative makes some elements of the past unavoidable, while neglecting others. When writing about innovations, or laboratories, the author has the ability to look back and gather the bits and pieces that support the narrative he or she wants to create, but also the responsibility to do so conscientiously. This raises the question whether it is possible to tell a story without having actively decided which story to tell. Therefore, the writer plays an active, and far from neutral, role.

For instance, Law, in his narrative from the *before* phase, tells how he promised to provide the managerial board of the organization under study with copies of all potential publications before they were released. This agreement indicated the requirement that the organization see accordance between the written words and the past promises. Thereby, this ordering of bits and pieces must encompass several elements. In the *before* phase: the promise to show them the text before publishing. From the *during* phase: relevance to and respect for the laboratory and the maintenance of good relations, so as not to endanger the access gained. From the *after* phase: the potential for the academic audience that will hopefully read the text later. Thus, telling a story about a technology is more than just telling the story that the writer wants; he or she will often be obliged to incorporate elements of a past, a present and a potential future from the point of view from where the narrative is told.

Whereas it might be obvious that modes of ordering from *before* fieldwork might affect modes of ordering *during* fieldwork, another interesting, and perhaps less intuitive, challenge comes when writing. For as we shall see, modes of ordering *after* the fieldwork can also affect modes of ordering *before* it in retrospect. This has to do with the ways retrospective accounts can render past events invisible even if, at the time of fieldwork, they seemed relevant. Thus, modes of ordering, even in the seemingly simple form of *before*, *during* and *after* fieldwork, call for further attention. Just as the researcher should be aware of innovations in-the-making as fragile and temporary, so too should this awareness be present when writing, in retrospect, about them.

In the book *Aircraft stories. Decentering the Object in Technoscience*, Law writes:

> *"I want to imagine alternative versions of what it is to theorize; versions that avoid the hierarchical distribution between theory and data, or theory and practice; versions that instead perform multiplicities and interferences¸ versions that come to terms, in the way they perform themselves, with the postmodern that it is not possible to draw everything*

> *together into a simple singular account; versions of theorizing that, in other words, are allegorical rather that literary in their form"* (Law 2002:39)

Thus, the writer is left with important decisions concerning what story or stories to tell, and which data to give voice to in the retrospective account. This sometimes includes actors, quotes, and interviews that seem to interfere with a coherent story.

In summary, an ethnographic approach to any subject studied provides an extensive amount of material gathered through fieldwork. However, this material may also include informants, and realities that did not fit the initial analytical framing that was brought into the field. Analytical tools need to be revised and adjusted, just as analytical tools emphasize and silence different aspects of the empirical data. It is a continuous cycle between theory and empirical data, which calls for accounts and awareness of the process of reaching the results that provide closure when finally fixed in writing[37]. Yet the translation of empirical data, with all its ambiguities and incoherence, calls for specific attention to the translation into a final text.

5.3 Positioning

John Law's concern that where the researcher is, the action is not, is highly relevant to consider when studying something that happens suddenly, that is dispersed through digital platforms, and that is subject to massive and continuously growing attention and interaction. The challenge of positioning oneself in this alone is difficult, but in addition to this we need to add the aspect of time. When speaking of access as a mode of ordering, it is not only *where* but also to a great degree *when* the researcher is positioned, that is important.

5.3.1 Different orderings: "as it happens" as opposed to "after"

Paying attention to these points in time from which to approach the object of study are consequential for the kind of story we tell. This is highly relevant for stories characterized by a lack of information, that feature asynchronous distorted distribution of information, and where ambiguity is a main driving force. When studying such stories, we need to be explicitly aware of the positions from where we encounter these stories.

An interesting insight related to this appears from comparing data gained in the case of VisitDenmark to that from the Speedbandits campaign. Whereas Speedbandits was studied 3 years after the

[37] I am aware that readers may open this up again, since the act of writing fixes the meaning only for the *writer* at a specific moment in time.

campaign had run, VisitDenmark was studied before it was confirmed to be a viral reality campaign. Where data was limited due to the passing of time while tracing the stories related to Speedbandits, VisitDenmark provided an excess of data. Stories spun around VisitDenmark's campaign played out in a highly intense and short period of time. These differences highlight how different kinds of access call for different kinds of ordering of data.

Speedbandits was retold by informants who did not recall many details regarding where they saw the video, with whom they shared it, and why they shared it. Informants described it as a fun video but rarely nuanced it in relation to misunderstandings, or to ethical or political discussion. However, newspapers and blog posts illustrated a greater variety in responses. They indicated a more general discussion that reached government officials, and became a topic for discussions on gender, ethics, and differences between nationalities. Time not only changed the level of details remembered by informants directly, but also changed the digital traces still accessible.

The illusion of digital traces

Data represented digitally creates an illusion of being a permanent proof. It gives the idea that data *is* there and *stays* there, while in practice elements are removed. Systems enabling content to remain in place vanish, and consequently, access to those elements disappears along with their systems. Where newspapers were accessible through archives, blogposts were not archived, and many links provided by Google redirected as the blogs were no longer there, or those blogposts Google had registered were subsequently deleted.

In awareness of this, I ensured that I had screenshots, stored videos, and made local copies of homepages, while I was in the intense process of gathering data. However, storing data also created an illusion of intactness. Paying attention to non-human actors has allowed me to be aware that as content travels, it gets displaced. Storing pictures, comments, and videos removes them from the infrastructure of which they were a part. Even though it may seem that having stored a video locally keeps it intact, this is not the case. A video stored no longer has hashtags that indicate similarities to other pieces of content. The timestamps indicating when it was posted, the number of views it got, who uploaded it, which comments and reactions it received, likes and dislikes given by viewers, etc. are all examples of metadata lost in preservation, and by extension, distorting the level of access valuable for later analysis.

The loss of metadata when videos are reuploaded as new copies has impact on informants in the field as well. They may encounter what seems to be the same video, despite being different regarding

context. This too is relevant for the researcher gathering data. In gathering data in digitally mediated settings, we need to pay attention to the work of algorithms, scripts indicating publication dates, and tags connecting content as "similar". Links to those who commented on videos are useful as a means for contacting informants, yet seemingly unimportant technical details such as storing threads as screenshots instead of as web pages prevent the researcher from using those links to reach potential informants. The ethnographer in the field needs to pay attention to the specific network of relations that these actors form, as well as what holds an actor together as one, both while gathering and storing data. Storing data as evidence, or as a means for later analysis, while necessary and useful, nevertheless means removing data from a specific network of relationships.

For the researcher studying what happened as the Speedbandits campaign ran, the illusion of digital traces still being accessible requires an awareness of what kinds of data can be gathered when using digitally mediated settings as a source for data gathering. For instance, the initial comments and reactions to Speedbandits were impossible to obtain, even though the video was still there. Each time the video was removed by YouTube, and reuploaded as a new copy by users, the comments that accompanied the video were deleted, and did not reappear with the newest uploaded version. Therefore, initial responses to the video no longer exist, even though the illusion that the video is there ready to be studied prevails. Since the Speedbandits video contained nudity, YouTube deleted it several times, though of course people reuploaded it again.

Fleeting connections such as deleted blog posts or videos, as well as the content they facilitated, are not solely relevant to pay attention to when studying older cases where time had passed. Even when positioned in the middle of campaigns, data disappears; this calls for awareness of storing and ensuring the preservation of material for later analysis. The homepage on Mono.net, featuring the mother's pictures and contact information, was deleted after a few days. It had a comment section to encourage participation. This comment section was pivotal for many contributors who tried to help the mother and show their sympathy. The comment section held together the various types of reactions, from people talking to the mother, to the actress, to Ditte or to various potential brands presumed to be behind the, also presumed, ad. As I read through and replied to these interesting comments, I managed to take a screenshot, but as the webpage was deleted, the direct line to those who replied was no longer kept intact. The site disappeared even before it was officially revealed to be a campaign from VisitDenmark. Using ANT highlights that an object of study may seemingly be one thing but turn out to be multiple things via looking at actors.

5.3.2 How to order things before they come into being

Just as the researcher should be aware of innovations in-the-making as fragile and temporary, so too should this awareness be present when writing retrospectively about them. However, the two do not necessarily map onto each other. Therefore, the act of studying something as it happens, as well as before it has manifested as a campaign, requires a forward-looking orientation towards futures that are only potentially materializing, whereas analysis and representations done in retrospect tend to neglect such potentials. Awareness of the different modes of ordering throughout the process are crucial to account for. As with the retrospective account of the Hitler/Cleveland references, we have seen how stories detached from their context, both in time and relationships, require a new ordering. This also means that the modes of ordering in retrospect may miss or distort elements. One example – that of how modes of ordering during the process of writing affect earlier modes of ordering from the stage of gathering data – becomes visible when it comes to unfulfilled expectation. Many of my informants reacted positively to VisitDenmark's Campaign at one point in time, as they assumed it was an ad for condoms and safe sex. In the light of another video that was suggested as similar to this one, Spies Rejser (a Danish travel agency that had had success with several controversial television ads that mixed humor, sex, and travel), VisitDenmark's story was deemed cool. It generated a great deal of buzz, not only digitally mediated and in personal conversations, but also via mass media coverage. However, as the story was later to be revealed as "the campaign of VisitDenmark", these people no longer reacted positively to it. It shifted from being a potentially cool story, to one that was disappointing.

There are different modes of ordering here to consider in the writing process. Data gathered from the time when the story was a version potentially about safe sex, and with a great potential for success based on other similar stories, tells the story of a successful campaign. This temporary promise of success ensured that it was spread and shared, surrounded by positive remarks and anticipation. Now that we are able to tell the story in retrospect, we know that the video was a viral reality marketing campaign for VisitDenmark, which was finally withdrawn from YouTube. Ultimately, the campaign was criticized on national television for using a lie to represent Danish tourism, which cost the director and several others their jobs. In retrospect, the positive, anticipatory, and excited comments were invalidated. They were no longer relevant to it, since they concerned a version of the future now rejected. These temporal and potential future outcomes and the discussions they keep generating among participants creates a challenge while in the field: because the relevance of data changes, it sometimes becomes irrelevant or even disruptive for the story in retrospect because potential brands

that temporarily were presumed to be behind the campaign did not fit into a retrospective elaboration of VisitDenmark's campaign. The question is how to encompass different modes of ordering in a way that does not exclude instances that, while writing, might be irrelevant but, while in the field, had an important impact on the awareness surrounding the campaign.

Collating data in retrospective accounts such as that of Speedbandits, highlights the fact that sometimes details are left out if they do not fit with the story (now) told. However, an awareness of what might be excluded from linear retrospective stories allows for contemplating different ways of writing, and different ways of giving voice to actors of the past. It calls for an awareness of the data that may later be rendered invisible. While in the field, we need to direct attention to such data with the mindset of connections as fleeting. This is particularly crucial when studying campaigns that have not yet come into being.

5.3.3 Ordering what is potentially connected

A final challenge in ordering data while studying viral reality campaigns is potential connections. I had followed many curious stories before the story of the mother, because I was certain that I had recognized a campaign, however, later realizing it was not. One such example is Debbie the Cat Lover, which turned out to be a real story where Debbie had made a video for her sister. As it went viral and had the hallmarks of an ad, it seemed obvious that it was marketing for eHarmony, the dating site to which she uploaded the video.

Not all viral reality marketing campaigns end up being revealed. Sometimes the strategic ambiguity is what keeps people busy, while confirmation contributes to closure. Morten Hoffmann from Far from Hollywood emphasized the Cola-Mentos connection: videos where Coke and Mentos are mixed, resulting in an explosion. Coca-Cola could be behind such videos; however, admitting that this as a campaign would ruin its value. The whole concept of such a campaign hinges on uncertainty, and some successful campaigns might only remain so if people speculate – but are not able to prove – whether it truly is a campaign. Coca-Cola has tried to stop the trend, claiming that it damages their brand, yet marketing experts suggest that this too could be an attempt to boost brand awareness. Most likely, we will never know the truth. Similarly, there is still the possibility that Debbie's video was

commissioned and that she was paid for making it. However, its popularity would diminish, and its element of authenticity would be lost if this were ever confirmed.[38]

During fieldwork, I often encountered videos that I had seen years earlier, yet had never known were advertising. I presume that many such campaigns are still unknown to me and that I simply failed to recognize them when I first encountered them. Thus, being in the field while studying a phenomenon – whose very premise relies on not being captured, described, or confirmed – requires constant and repeated reordering. Content encountered may or may not be advertising, and the researcher must approach it without assuming that it is one or the other. Entering the field requires an open mind, but in a field where strategic ambiguity is a deliberate strategy, potential connections are modes of ordering that serve to enlighten us. The modes of ordering here are counterintuitive, as ordering connections by not ordering them is the way to allow for the ambiguity. Yet explaining what is deliberately ambiguous has the danger of removing what drives the phenomenon.

In summary, modes of ordering serve to create awareness of the many instances in which ordering is going on, as both ethnographer and informants actively navigate in digitally mediated settings with different kinds of access and at different times. The translation between the different modes of ordering is pivotal. Without specific awareness of how the researcher moves between different modes throughout the process, we may incidentally turn incoherent data into a story as if it had been a campaign all along. Doing so is a misrepresentation of what went on as it happened.

To illustrate the implications in using ambiguity to explain what went on in retrospect, let us look back at the case of VisitDenmark. In doing so we saw several versions simultaneously:

- *It is a campaign* – but only to VisitDenmark and GoViral.
- *It is potentially a campaign* – to the researcher dropping everything at hand to attend.
- *It is not a campaign* – to those speaking to the mother telling her not to listen to the negative comments.
- *It is a campaign* but *could potentially be from multiple brands* – to those who recognize signs and references to similar campaigns.

[38] There is an interesting strand of literature within public relations, dealing with companies using strategic ambiguity to keep people interested, as well as to lessen doubts that could damage the brand. Thus, ambiguity is known and used in brand communications (Eisenberg 2006; Paul and Stribak 1997; Sellnow and Timothy 1997).

- *It is not yet a campaign* – to the analyst as well as writer.

All these versions exist simultaneously from the point of view of the researcher trying to tell the story of what happened. Yet the ambiguity of all the multiple versions does not contribute to explaining why the individual actors did what they did. To borrow a formulation from physics, seen in retrospect, these variations are in a state of superposition in which they all exist simultaneously. This mode of ordering allows us to highlight the ambiguities in discussing a campaign, by asking when and where the campaign is. This is a benefit of being positioned where we *know* it is a campaign. Attention to modes of ordering and the gaps between them helps us to keep in mind what was known to whom, and at what point in time. This insight requires navigation when analyzing and writing retrospectively, if we are not to misinterpret what people did, by retrospectively bringing concepts into the story that did not exist at the time.

5.4 Spatiality

Through the various empirical examples discussed so far, it has become clear that ambiguity, battles of meaning, deliberate play on words carrying multiple meanings, and strategically blurred lines between fake, real, humor, satire, and controversial content, all play crucial roles in viral reality marketing. Not only are boundaries difficult to define, as informants often disagree on how and where to draw them, but they are also deliberately blurred, since the format of viral reality marketing is to create stories that *lack* information and, thus, are open to conflicting variations. Therefore, we must consider additional theoretical approaches to ambiguity as well as to boundary-making. In the following sections, different types of spatiality are introduced and discussed with focus on their distinct features in grasping stability achieved through ambiguity. These new concepts highlight the duality between things changing while at the same time keeping specific elements in place.

5.4.1 Boundary objects

We have seen how ANT is useful as a mode of ordering while in the field, because of its removal of a priori assumptions. However, as a mode of ordering when analyzing, ANT is less helpful. For instance, it may point to the way hashtags hold together many actors, but it does not enlighten us on how and why people engage for conflicting reasons simultaneously. As an analytical counterproposal to ANT, Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer have suggested the term boundary object to elaborate on cooperation between parties *despite* different interests.

> *"The problem of translation as described by Latour [...] is central to the reconciliation described in this paper. In order to create scientific authority, entrepreneurs gradually enlist participants from a range of locations re-interpret their concerns to fit their own pragmatic goals and then establish themselves as gatekeepers [...] Yet a central feature of this situation is that entrepreneurs from more than one Social World are trying to conduct such translations simultaneously [...][This] n-way nature of the intersegment cannot be understood from a single viewpoint" (Star and Griesemer 1989:389)*

With boundary objects, Star and Griesemer try to analytically escape the one-way perspective that ANT provides, when it focuses on the role of the entrepreneurs and fact-builder attempting to enroll other actors as allies around the stabilization of obligatory passage points.

Star and Griesemer emphasize that there are several actors, who all simultaneously try to stabilize their facts. Boundary objects are defined as: *"[...] objects that both inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them."* (Star and Griesemer 1989:393). They are sufficiently malleable to adapt to local needs, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. The concept of boundary objects is a response specifically to the concept of interessement (Latour 1988; Callon 1986) where entrepreneurs gradually recruit allies to stabilize their ideas or inventions. However, according to Star and Griesemer, total alignment of interests is not necessary. Diverging interests can coexist (Star and Griesemer 1989:339). Where Callon elaborates on translation as something enabling alignment of both fact builder and various interested parties, Star and Griesemer emphasize that their interests are aligned only to the extent that they agree to engage with the same object, but not necessarily the motivations.

Boundary objects allow us to question the required extent of alignment for a cooperation to be successful for the participants. For instance, we can ask: "Must the motivation for sharing a video involve it being part of a campaign to promote some specific product?" In ANT's view, people sharing the video have aligned interests, whereas Star and Griesemer would say that they may engage in the same boundary object, but it is the mechanisms of the boundary object that allow them to engage while maintaining their own interest.

ANT is a field researcher's tool, allowing relations and connections to be mapped as they are made. Boundary objects, on the other hand, is a tool that allows the analyst to explain collaboration despite differing interests.

Boundary objects allow the analyst to highlight complexities of collaboration and produce an explanation of successful collaboration. However, this aligns various coexisting interests even when

participants themselves do not acknowledge their shared interest in the object. Thus, using boundary objects to analyze collaboration does not provide insights into the internal disagreements of those held together by the boundary objects, nor into how they may actively and strategically try to alter, hijack, or affect the boundary object in order to increase their own interests or to exclude others. Disagreements and deliberate acts of resistance are rendered invisible when the analyst uses boundary objects to describe the events and situation.

Strategy disagreements and ambiguity

Star and Griesemer provide no focus on those who create these objects nor on what strategies are put to use when some try to shape them in specific ways. The analyses of Callon (Callon 1986) and Latour (Latour 1988) provide a specific perspective from where to approach interaction: that of the fact builder. Callon's analysis suggests an analytical starting point in the obligatory passage point, whereas Star and Griesemer take the multiple interests as theirs. However, both pay little attention to the strategic creation of mechanisms that are shared. Callon and Latour are not concerned with the strategic creation of an obligatory passage point from a specific point of view, as agency is distributed to each actor, and each actor translates its interests to be aligned. Star and Griesemer do not disregard strategy, politics, or battles over what the boundary object should represent, but neither do they address it.

Joan Fujimura has criticized boundary objects for not acknowledging disagreements. She argues:

> *"[…] while Boundary objects can promote translation for the purpose of winning allies, they can also allow others to resist translation and to construct other facts. They have a wider margin of negotiation." (Fujimura 1992:174).*

Fujimura attempts to find a middle ground between the boundary object and the stabilization of facts that ANT speaks of. Whereas boundary objects serve to describe collaborations, there is active work going into designing, changing, and engineering them. This involves actions on the part of multiple people who do this simultaneously during the collaboration.

One particular study that has addressed the active work going into designing boundary objects is "Engineering Objects for Collaboration: Strategies of Ambiguity and Clarity at Knowledge Boundaries" (Barley, Leonardi, and Bailey 2012). In this study, strategy does not emerge from a single entrepreneur. Instead, the emphasis is on how multiple people all strategically try to design boundary objects as means for collaboration.

This study attends to objects *as they are created* as opposed to locating already existing boundary objects in cross-boundary collaborations. Barley, Leonardi, and Bailey put specific emphasis on individual agency and strategic action in shifting between strategic ambiguity and strategies of clarity. They spent three months observing car manufacturers from three different divisions and followed three groups of engineers with diverging objectives such as frame and body, noise and vibration, and crashworthiness. These different areas required different expertise and implied the potential for conflicting interests. To be able to collaborate on the overall solutions, the groups actively used representations, graphs, and images as boundary objects to coordinate collaboration. There was a high degree of active work in *designing* the boundary objects before presenting them to the others. In contrast to the way Star and Griesemer introduced boundary objects as means for collaboration, Barley, Leonardi and Bailey highlights how individuals deliberately design boundary objects in specific ways. They refer to the boundary object as a tool in the hands of those who collaborate, where Star and Griesemer use it as an analytical tool to explain collaboration.

Callon's elaboration of translation touches on some of the same issues that boundary objects do, but the focus is different: Callon is concerned with the obligatory passage point and how actors align their interest with it. Actors' multiple interests are a consequence of the translations necessary for the relation to be kept. Callon's elaboration of translation and the different phases it consists of is an elaboration of ANT. Star and Griesemer on the other hand take the multiple interests as a starting point and use them as a critique of ANT. Star and Griesemer use the boundary object to avoid the n-way perspective that they criticize ANT for producing. Their approach however, raises a methodological question; if an object cannot be understood from one single viewpoint, then which perspectives should be considered? If boundary objects are tools of the analyst, then the analyst has the power to determine the degree to which an object is the same, even though those engaging might be doing so for different reasons.

Boundary objects are concerned with actors who engage with the *same* boundary object with different interests. But as we have seen in the empirical examples, participants in a viral reality marketing campaign may also be engaging with *different objects* while considering them the *same*. Using boundary objects to analyze viral reality marketing is one step in the right direction in highlighting differences despite cooperation, yet analytically it ascribes a fixedness to the boundary object as a mechanism holding it all together. This approach produces similarities in the boundary object as a mechanism that ensures stability despite different interests. However, we have seen empirically, that

this way of approaching the phenomenon does not highlight the dynamic that is driven by the ambiguity, nor the stability and continuous growth of campaigns that cause conflicting stories.

One characteristic of viral reality marketing stories is that they often make radical shifts. The analytical use of boundary objects conceals how one story is used as bait for another; a person's interest and motivation in the boundary object may likewise shift radically as the brand is revealed. This raises the question of whether and when the analyst violates informants analytically when concepts are assigned to them. For instance, the analyst may juxtapose participants as part of the same campaign even though they may not be aware of or care about their participation, or they may participate in order to direct the brand's attention towards a different matter or as a protest.

Similarly, the analyst's presentation may clash with an informant's understanding and view, when fixing the campaign as taking place during some time span. The campaign will exist and not exist simultaneously for different informants. In the field during the roll out of a campaign such as the one for VisitDenmark, the researcher gathering data may *not yet* suspect that it is a campaign. To Mindjumpers, it is *potentially* a campaign, but the brand is not a crucial feature. It only matters that it is *not a campaign from Mindjumpers*. At the same time, to some participants it is, potentially and *temporarily an ad for condoms*. Finally, to VisitDenmark it *is*, and *always has been* a campaign for tourism.

These different, yet simultaneously existing, framings of what "it" is, are crucial as they generate momentum. Yet analyzing what is going on using obligatory passage points and boundary objects does not highlight these inconsistencies. They miss how incoherence and conflicting potential versions keeps a viral reality marketing campaign alive. Therefore, we must analytically apply focus on the multiple interests that drive participation, the simultaneously existing yet conflicting objects, as well the ambiguity that unites the participants.

5.4.2 Fluid objects

John Law and Vicky Singleton refer to the boundary object in their study of alcoholic liver disease, as a potential way of approaching phenomena shared by multiple groups of patients, practitioners as well across several physical locations. Though they do not criticize the concept of boundary objects, they suggest an add-on to it. *"We want, that is, to conduct an experiment that moves us from multiple interpretations of objects [...] to thinking about multiple objects themselves"* (Law and Singleton 2005:333).

The alcoholic liver disease is both a disease and yet it is practiced as several versions by multiple people in multiple locations. But the disease is not *a* fixed phenomenon performed differently; it is several overlapping, yet distinct, versions performed simultaneously, - and they change as well.

Yet the disease is relatively stable as it progresses and changes slowly over time. We need to consider objects of study that are practiced by several groups of people, dispersed across various locations while *also* abruptly shifting shape from being a potential campaign to being multiple, and later one brand confirmed over others as the one behind the campaign.

An analytical shift from boundary objects to fluid objects turns things upside down by questioning the acts of analytical boundary-making. It focuses on the practices in which different versions of the objects coexist. There is no longer a shared mechanism, or a single shared obligatory passage point that holds together different actors despite differing interests. Instead, it is held together by several coexisting, sometimes conflicting versions. Fluidity, as introduced by philosopher Annemarie Mol, suggests that new questions emerge as the objects handled in practice are not the same from one site to another: *"If practices are foregrounded there is no longer a single passive object in the middle, waiting to be seen from the point of view of seemingly endless series of perspectives."* (Mol 2002:5). Instead, she argues that objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated. As such, objects of manipulation tend to differ from one practice to another as reality multiplies. Therefore, she suggests specifically attending to the multiplicity of reality. This makes it relevant to shift from a focus on objects, to one of coordination between differing (versions of) objects. It allows asking whether, and how, objects that go under a single name can avoid clashes and explosive confrontations. Mol suggests that despite tensions between various versions of an object, these sometimes depend on one another (Mol 2002: 5-6). For instance, fathers' responses, Hitler Rant Parodies, and the Onion's story of Lars von Trier may not be related. Using boundary objects as a concept, these pieces of content will be excluded if the boundary object is the video featuring the mother. If the boundary object is instead the campaign, then the fathers' responses, Hitler Rant Parodies, and the Onion may contribute to it, but none of the three have interests that are aligned with the boundary object. If we switch to fluidity, the fathers' replies are related, but do not require mutual relatedness. The fathers' replies depend on Mindjumpers' response to VisitDenmark's. The stories coexist.

Another example where fluidity highlights differences that the concept of boundary objects will miss is in capturing ambiguity without distinguishing between whether something is different or similar.

it can be both simultaneously. Consider the question of how to analytically capture the relationship between speedbandits.dk and speedbandit.dk, and between speedbandits.dk and speedbandits.dk with shifted domain owners as well. Are the two URLs connected, or are they different? This can be solved by asking who is behind them. Then speedbandit.dk at one point in time, and speedbandits.dk, at another, are different, because they are owned by two different people. Yet they feature the same content, so from the perspective of visitors, they may be the same. As boundary objects, speedbandit.dk, as well as Speedbandits.dk with new owners, are disconnected. Danish Road Safety Council is not interested and does not engage with it, therefore, from their perspective they are not connected. Yet informants may see them as the same, just as search engines might see speedbandits.dk as the same despite changing domain owners. Therefore, from the point of view of site visitors, and search engines, they may be the same. By adding fluidity to the analysis, we can view both URLs, as well as the URL with changed ownership, as the same, yet fluid, actor, since all versions are part of the same practice. Thus, if they are included, referred to, or informants associate them, they are part of the same fluid object, while also different versions simultaneously. Focus shifts to the coordination between versions that are enacted. Summing up, using fluidity as an analytical framing, we can see the object as various versions that coexist without labeling them as either cooperation or conflict. We are free to include several versions, and instead focus on their conflicts and interdependencies as we foreground practices. Connections hold actors together, while simultaneously allowing a wider range of variations to be captured and included.

In their study of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump, De Laet and Mol show how the pump has fluid boundaries: *"We want to analyze the specific quality that attracts us to the ZBP. This turns out to be its fluidity. So in what follows we lay out the various ways in which this piece of technology, so advanced in its simplicity, is fluid in its nature"* (de Laet and Mol 2000:225).

Asking the question of whether technology works the way it is supposed to can only rarely be answered. Instead there are many grades or shades of 'working'; there are adaptations and variants, yet "*it's not clear when exactly the pump stops acting, when it achieves its aims, and at which point it fails and falters"* (de Laet and Mol 2000:227).

The achievement of the pump being fluid is that "it" is enacted as a strong object due to its many variations. Their approach is in many ways in line with the ANT way of thinking. However, for the analyst, there is a difference. Mol and De Laet celebrate the strength that lies in analytically

juxtaposing variations as the same, yet fluid, actor. The researcher plays a highly active role, just as the informants do, in enacting different versions of the fluid object.

Mol and De Laet position themselves in relation to the concept of the boundary object as well. The boundaries of a boundary object are interpreted differently in the different worlds it inhabits, but the boundaries for the object stay firm, the boundary object remains the same. This is not the case with a fluid object, which changes over time.

Fluidity is an analytical concept that allows for comparison of a variety of versions. Fluid objects are analytical modes of ordering that focus on differences being strengths for the object(s) success rather than being problematic. Labeling something as fluid to expand borders is of course a theoretical contribution. It does not consider how versions of object(s) in some empirical setting might locally be perceived as much less fluid. The concept of fluid object helps to create awareness of two aspects: Analytically we may treat an object as fluid, but at the same time empirically it may be perceived or experienced as much less fluid.

Comparing boundary objects to fluid objects reminds us, that there is a power in analytically defining an actor as fluid, since it allows for various variations to be analytically included and juxtaposed. But including versions as similar, may differ from what those whom the analysis speaks of considers similar. Therefore, conflicts still call for attention to the difference between an analytical achievement, and the analyzed subjects who may perceive similarities and differences differently.

5.4.3 Fire objects and spatialities

A final analytical concept worth adding is the fire object. However, to understand the differences between the different types of objects presented here, we dive into a methodological discussion on how to use topologies as analytical tools for treating, grasping, understanding, explaining, writing about, and enacting ethnographic objects within science and technology studies.

Through their paper "'Situating Techno-Science: an Inquiry into Spatialities'" John Law and Annemarie Mol build up the argument that spatialities deserve attention. Summing up various previous works of theirs, they emphasize four such spatialities: region, network, fluid, and fire (Law and Mol 2001). These spatialities account for different kinds of stability. For instance, Law refers to a previous study of long distance control of vessels traveling between Lisbon and Calicut (Law 1986). The point is that it takes effort for something to hold shape as it travels. The vessel becomes immutable because the different components held one another in place. However, Law emphasizes,

that there is a double production, because while this explanation concerns network spatiality, the vessel moves physically in Euclidian space as well. These two should be considered different, yet overlapping, topologies that are used to describe aspects of the vessel successfully holding together as stable despite, as well as while, traveling. The immutability in network space affords both the immutability and mobility in Euclidian space. Thus, it is the interference between the spatial systems that affords the vessel its special properties. And this is the very core of Mol and Law's argument: we must pay attention to such spatialities and their overlaps and interferences.

We have already learned about the concept of fluidity. But along with the specific attention to overlaps and interferences between spatialities, fluidity once again becomes interesting. Fluid spatiality is both non-Euclidian and non-network; it is an *other* to the network. Talking about a fluid object in terms of network would amputate it and miss connections that are only made visible by shifting spatiality. For instance, the bush pump changes shape from place to place. Thinking in terms of network spatiality one would approach this as a failed network, as the network comes with configurational invariance. But the pump, described within a fluid spatiality, shows configurational variance. Hence, it is a mutable mobile. But what allows it to travel and stay stable then, one might ask? The answer is that whereas objects in networks hold their shape by freezing relations rather than fixing Euclidean coordinates, fluid objects hold their shape by *shifting* their relations. They do so, slowly, gradually, and incrementally. Law and Mol describe it as a process of gradual adaptation with no great breaks or disruptions.

Law and Mol illustrate the extent to which an object can hold stability despite changing relations as something that flows, playing with the analogy of water or something that steadily and – to a certain extent – predictably changes. To provide an intuitive understanding they refer to Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance: *a sameness, a shape constancy, which does not depend on any particular defining feature or relationship, but rather on the existence of many instances which overlap with one another partially.* (Law Mol 2011 p.614). This spatiality puts an emphasis on temporarily overlapping elements such as videos that are recognized for their reference to the story of the mother seeking a father in a more loosely related way. Without the story of the mother, they would not make sense, therefore they depend on it, yet they vary. They are similar enough to be recognized as spoofs, even though the elements differ.

This brings us to a final spatiality I want to emphasize, conceptualized as fire objects. Here constancy is achieved in several ways: in a relation between presence and absence, continuity as an effect of

discontinuity, continuity as the presence, and the absence of otherness. Once again, this spatiality is different from network and Euclidian spatiality, as well as fluid spatiality. Constancy is not achieved by freezing, fixing, or shifting relations. Constancy is achieved by relations between similarities and differences. Continuity and stability are described as an effect of discontinuity. Fire objects deal with breaks, things that are absent or cease to exist, and where their absence makes other presences possible. This spatiality embraces abrupt and pivotal shifts. They are no longer an analytical threat that messes or confuses the picture of what is going on but the very essence of it. The constancy in campaigns is produced in abrupt and discontinuous movements. This topology can be considered a call for attention to discontinuous transformation, as a flickering relation between absence and presence. It achieves its constancy in relations between presence and absence. Thus, there is a focus on what must be absent for an object to be present. This spatiality brings forward how a campaign can continue to grow by the absence of verified facts and confirmation. The lack of known guidelines and modus operandi avoids that the absence of a brand becomes a challenge. Instead, it becomes the very core that holds the campaign together in all its localized, unpredictable outbursts.

It is this absence of brand that keeps people engaged initially. The absence of clarity permits the presence of various potential campaigns simultaneously. The various semi-related events, dramatic turns of events, ignited debates, and controversial interpretations are the drivers that keep viral reality marketing alive. Using fluid spatiality, we can describe how campaigns develop in unforeseen and unpredictable ways with the inclusion of conflicting versions simultaneously. This way of describing fluidity enables us to capture the otherwise messy empirical data, and answer questions differently. However, using the fire spatiality, we can highlight how they depended on the absence of any comments from VisitDenmark for Anders Lund Madsen's fish version to work. In both spatialities, the connection between the first and the second video, featuring the actress, is considered relevant. However, in fire spatiality the focus is specifically on role that absence plays in keeping the campaign growing.

This shift is pivotal when it comes to converting ambiguous, conflicting, and controversial data into analysis. Instead of analytically cleaning up mess and removing data that confuses the story, it shifts to emphasizing constancy as an effect of discontinuity and relations between absence and presence. Ambiguity is an *other* to certainty. For people to keep engagement, the absence of a clear explanation must be present.

5.5 Representation

Being in the middle of things while not knowing for sure whether it is a campaign, and hence the brand behind it, highlights a multitude of stories and potential futures. This is not only the case for the participants of viral reality marketing campaigns. It was also the case for me as an ethnographer. while I was doing fieldwork around the VisitDenmark Campaign. The unique positioning in the middle of something that potentially could turn out to be a campaign had two consequences: it provided me with a unique access to the experience, by being in the same boat as my informants. But it was also a challenge to retrospectively write about a campaign that only became so after some time.

Regarding access, I shared an experience with my informants in which we all navigated without knowing for sure what we were dealing with. This access highlighted the role of incoherence, uncertainties, and of multiple potential, yet temporary future outcomes. These aspects were not visible to me in the case of Danish Road Safety Council, even though it too ran for some time without confirmation that it was an ad. However, when trying to retrospectively tell the story, many of these potential outcomes and potential futures seem to disappear, since they never materialized. There is a great chance that many such potentials, yet never materialized outcomes have existed too, and that they have been rendered invisible over time. Firstly, as Morten Hoffmann, mentioned, people forget about it. Secondly, as my fieldwork around Speedbandits showed, digital settings make initial reactions – and thereby also the assumptions of potential future outcomes, as they temporarily existed – vanish, as videos featuring reactions are continuously deleted. When thinking of the data as fluid, we acknowledge that there are various versions, and that one may depend on another. In fire spatiality, we embrace the relation between absences and presences. However, the various potential futures and expectations likewise need to be accounted for, even if only temporarily existing. Expectations and potential futures coexist only temporarily, yet I will argue, that their impact remains. When converting data into writing, we need to contemplate how to give voice to these temporalities.

5.5.1 Narrative infrastructures

Temporality highlights a gap between being in a field at a specific time, while writing about it in another. This calls for considerations of how to account for the difference between potential futures, and never fulfilled ones. This is particularly relevant in viral reality marketing as data collection must be performed on something that is not yet a campaign. Therefore, it is not only the participants of a campaign for whom the challenge of managing expectations and continuously rewriting the story as new information is added. The writer faces analogous challenges when translating these temporarily existing futures into a coherent, often linear story without rendering them invisible.

Returning once again to studies of future orientation, Deuten and Rip take up this issue while contemplating narrative structures and the role of expectations (Deuten and Rip 2000). They raise the issue of linearity and how it comes about in innovation processes. They argue that stories of successful innovations are often retrospectively told in a linear way, with the first plans leading "naturally" to the eventual outcomes. In such accounts, the eventual achievement functions as a goal to be reached. It lays out the stages of a journey along the path, as though it was visible from the beginning. The point for Deuten and Rip is to illustrate how actual journeys are much less linear than these retrospective accounts lead us to believe. Linear accounts will often end up as a simplification and distortion of much more complex processes than the retrospective narrative represents (Deuten and Rip 2000:66). What can be learned from this is that accounts are being produced all the time, by a multitude of actors, not just by one narrator, and not just after a journey has ended. Deuten and Rip's point is to highlight that journeys, and their endings, are rhetorical contributions, constructed and shaped in particular ways by such retrospective accounts. A more nuanced picture can be gained by paying attention to the narrative structure as ongoing and everchanging.

When it comes to linearity, it either does not exist, as multiple actors have various interests for engaging, or linearity exists as a direct consequence of the retrospective account. Deuten and Rip have a solution to this. They emphasize narrative infrastructures as ongoing interactions that are created by an always heterogeneous mosaic of multi-authored stories but linearity, or more precisely direction, is created through future orientation. Whereas linearity made retrospectively through narratives simplifies the processes, it does not imply that linearity does not exist. The point is to realize and illustrate how linearity emerges *from* such exchanges. Despite the multiple contributions, Deuten and Rip's interests lie in is how one master story may evolve from this mosaic. They elaborate on this by referring to narrative building blocks that are taken up again and again, thereby becoming more widely accepted. Concurrently with an increasingly wider acceptance, they start orienting action and interaction. The building blocks and their linkages constitute a narrative that enables as well as constrains. Consequently, when a narrative infrastructure evolves out of the multiple stories, actors become characters that cannot easily change their identity and the role they are able to play through their own initiative (Deuten and Rip 2000:68). This implies a narrative reduction of complexity, not one made from retrospective accounts, but from the presence and from the narratives of futures existing in this present (Deuten and Rip 2000:78). Thus, there *are* closures. There will always be bits and pieces of stories that will be left out, however, by paying attention to presents and their possible futures, we can understand such processes differently.

5.5.2 Modes of ordering in retrospective accounts

Specific modes of ordering that focus on the present and the future seen from that present are useful in shedding light on temporality and potentiality. However, writing is a change in the mode of ordering. Rather than being concerned with presents and futures, it is an orientation towards the past. This retrospective mode of ordering that comes from writing and accounting for what has occurred, may render uncertainties and potentials invisible. We must be aware of the translations and transformations of stories as we shift between different modes of ordering, and that a priori assumptions, especially implicit assumptions, influence the narrative. A methodological concern here is that the clarity of hindsight can alter or eliminate the ambiguity of the past.

So far, we have considered how to analytically capture fragile shape-shifting objects. We have directed attention to how they serve as modes of ordering of a seemingly incoherent field. It allowed us to put in focus temporarily existing futures and highlight expectations without excluding the ones left unfulfilled, and we have discussed how we may account for these in writing. Now we need to bring everything together. We have established that there are modes of ordering throughout the process of turning research questions into specific interests in the field, and further to convert empirical data from the field into writing. In the final section we shall zoom in on the methodological concerns. The analytical contributions do not only concern how to conceptualize what is going on in the field. They also contribute to awareness of modes of ordering in translation between data gathering, analyzing, and writing. Furthermore, the benefits of paying attention to temporality as well as performativity are useful to remember when telling the story of viral reality marketing, that is, in the writing process.

This analysis, i.e., my story told about the viral reality marketing campaigns, is a fractal, temporal version of what happened. At the same time, it is also a story with an impact. It has a performative role in focusing specifically on studying sudden, uncontrolled, disperse, ambiguous and unpredictable events, as well as the complexities of being positioned in the middle of things without trying to create order and closure methodologically that is not reflected in the field. Disciplined lack of clarity is suggested as a mode for ordering.

5.6 From objects to practices

Recall fire objects and how they were made up of fluid, coexisting versions (Mol). They consisted of similarities, differences, presences, and absences (Law), juxtaposed, and ordered to enact a temporary whole. We continue from this line of thinking to a more reflective level concerning methods. Mol

and Law continue along the same lines of thinking when it comes to methods in focusing on practices, including conflicting and ambiguous versions side by side. For them, contemplating analytical objects and methods are two sides of the same coin. They highlight the performative role in practicing such objects. Therefore, when it comes to methods, both Mol and Law explicitly take a stance that moves us away from describing objects, and closer to shaping worlds. They provide inspirational insights that exceed modes of ordering as something belonging to gaining access, being in the field, analyzing and writing *about* the world. They point to the *active* role the ethnographer, analyst, and writer has in shaping worlds, but also to his or her fractal positioning in it.

5.6.1 Turning mess into disciplined lack of clarity

While linking focus on fluidity and fire objects to method, Law, once again, directs attention to absences and presences, by asking what is left out when telling a story. Methods, he argues, act as cleaning mechanisms, sorting out data to create coherence and order. More specifically he asks: "*What mess is left when analytical order is created*?" He argues that methods do not just describe social realities but are also involved in creating them. Methods are always political, and it raises the question of what kinds of social realities we want to create.

> *"Sometimes I think of it as a form of hygiene. Do your methods properly. Eat your epistemological greens. Wash your hands after mixing with the real world. Then you will lead the good research life. Your data will be clean. Your findings warrantable. The product you will produce will be pure. It will come with the guarantee of a long shelf-life" (Law 2006:2)*

Hygiene and cleanliness are used here to illustrate how methods sometimes sort out and provide neat and coherent pictures of things that are not necessarily so in practice. The clean pictures are *an effect* of the methods used. Things are *"distorted into clarity"* (Law 2004:2). In practice, he argues, research needs to be messy and heterogeneous, because that is how most of our world is. An important nuance here is that whereas clarity does not always help, a disciplined lack of clarity might. The argument is that clarity is sometimes imposed to create a simple, coherent picture. This is done at the expense of a reality behind it, that is less clear, messier, and often contradictory. Therefore, when social sciences try to describe things that are complex, diffuse, and messy, they often make a mess out of them, and… *"the very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess"* (Law 2004:2). This is because simple, clear descriptions do not work when the object of study is incoherent.

John Law and Vicky Singleton link these methodological concerns specifically to fire objects. Their article "Object Lessons" (Law and Singleton 2005) is as much about methods in general, as it is about

illustrating how the empirical data intervenes, resists, and creates challenges in the encounter with methods. Their task seems simple: to map trajectories of typical patients of alcoholic liver disease. At first, mapping the trajectory proved difficult, because the informants and their descriptions created a mess. Trajectories offered by one interviewee did not plug into trajectories suggested by another. Further, their research object was a moving and shapeshifting target. For example, issues such as liver disease, alcoholic cirrhosis, and alcohol abuse, all became part of the research. This raised the question of what they were *actually* studying. They asked themselves why they were not able to get a proper set of focused interviews that could be easily mapped. Their first reflections on method were directed towards whether they were asking the wrong questions, whether they were accidently misleading the interviewees, or if the interviewees were simply talking about the wrong things, due to their way of conducting research. Soon, however, they turned this challenge into an insight: the object of study was less coherent, and therefore it clashed with their attempts to map versions onto each other.

Mol provides another example in which she illustrates how to think of methods differently. Drawing on Law's disciplined lack of clarity (Law 2004), she argues that this approach can provide new insights. In a presentation of what methods do she refers to a fieldwork she did regarding taste (Mol 2009). She spent time at a nursing home but felt uncomfortable about not doing anything but observing and talking to informants. She therefore started participating in daily activities such as helping with minor practical things. Entering *this* practice enabled her to access a different type of data. It created new roles, and, consequently, new insights into the object of her study emerged.

She was considered one of the helpers, while gathering the used plates and cutlery. When taking the soup cups, she asked, as servers do in restaurants: *"Was het lekker?"* (was it good?). One woman replied while smiling "Yes, dear". The way she said it, Mol explained, showed that the woman was the one caring for Mol, appreciating the gesture. Continuing, Mol explains that the soup became *an object* enabling the old woman to care about the one who took the used plates. She continued to the next lady, who replied in a somewhat different tone "*You don't hear me complain!"* This lady was older, and presumably never going to be anywhere else. She was qualifying her life and herself in saying *"I am not a complainer"*. Thus, the soup was practiced as an object, that allowed her to define and describe herself. The taste of the soup, and whether it was good or not, was no longer the actual issue. The overflow of qualification that could now be ascribed to the soup was the issue. In this case, asking about the taste of the soup is a bad method to learn about the taste of soup. The soup, so to

speak, overflows. However, asking what practices surround the soup, by focusing on how it is enacted, allowed for something else. Her example underlines the argument that methods deserve attention continually and specifically in local settings, and should not be considered neutral, well tested, and known tools for mapping the world.

Mol suggests two approaches in illustrating what might come out of different methods for studying the soup. Two types of critique could be raised: the reductionism critique versus the "*you are not scientific enough*". Scientists would argue that to be scientific, Mol's example fails, and that she does not capture *real* taste – just old people babbling a bit. A researcher doing fieldwork while following informants, on the contrary, might reply to scientists in laboratories "*You don't have real taste, not lived taste*". But Mol's point is not concerned with determining which approach is more correct than the other. The lesson here is that the question is *not* which is more real. The question is which methods get to know more about the world. By shifting terminology, subjects change as well.

This serves as a small example of disciplined lack of clarity. The choice of changing the scope from the soup to what different data it enables, illustrates the benefits of both holding on to something, ("the soup") while allowing for several stories. In a way, this lack of insistence of coherence moves focus away from or confuses what "it" is all about – taste. Especially in cases of viral reality marketing, the challenge is to capture and analyze an object that resists because its very premise is to stay ambiguous and unconfirmed; many analytical and methodological approaches may simply fail. Instead, we should *assume* incoherence and look for overlaps, negotiation, and conflicts between different versions of it. The benefit of a disciplined lack of clarity is that it allows us to include and visualize incoherencies and ambiguities. But this approach is not only advantageous in the field. Disciplined lack of clarity is a mode of ordering that can be used throughout the process of turning empirical data into a story about it. Methods are not only an afterthought on how to account for data gathered in the field. They are continuous modes of ordering and continuous awareness of the interferences between modes of ordering and the in- and exclusions they produce. Thus, similarities pointed out by informants in the field may be valuable, even when the ethnographer does not see the connection. Recall my informants' responses to my request for examples of viral marketing. They pointed to videos shared because they were entertaining, irrespective of whether they were part of a campaign. And even when so, they could not necessarily point out the associated brand or message. The overflow of qualifications of such videos serves to highlight and illuminate the practices in which viral content flow.

Navigating in viral reality marketing campaigns has taught me the value of a disciplined lack of clarity as a method for gathering data. It has made visible the way informants refer to and engage with viral content in many contradictory ways simultaneously. It has enabled many variations and versions of what is going on that did not match my initial understanding of viral reality marketing. Including the direction my informants pointed me – whatever it was – allowed for an understanding of *their* boundary-making.

The inconsistencies between my boundary-making and that of my informants, also contributed to considerations regarding my role when telling the story. Is striving to tell the whole story even a relevant ambition? How can one present what happened when the informants do not agree on it? Why is that story relevant when it does not represent the stories that informants encountered and described? The disciplined lack of clarity allows for including, and taking seriously, such incoherence.

Disciplined lack of clarity calls attention to the conversion of mess into stories. To the writer, the story is a fixed enactment of what went on. In that respect, as I write my story, it is with the awareness that it is one specific version out of many, coexisting ones. As with the overqualification of the soup, we can shift from viral reality marketing as a thing, to practices that enact it. As we have seen throughout the empirical material, practices surrounding viral reality marketing conflict, informants resist, relevance differs depending on informants' knowledge or entertainment preferences, algorithms influence whether videos are considered "the same," and the passage of time distorts any attempt at telling the stories. The question is, how do we *not* make a mess of such things when imposing specific modes of ordering? How do we avoid unintentionally translating chaos and cacophony into coherent stories of viral campaigns, when they are not? Disciplined lack of clarity does not imply an absence of discipline and ordering. It simply means that fractal perspectives or versions can be emphasized as they should. This is a matter of specific kinds of modes of ordering – in the field, in the analysis, and in the writing.

6. Temporality, potentiality, and ambiguity

From the very beginning of this dissertation, boundaries and boundary-making were flagged as important areas in relation to viral reality marketing. The initial challenge in studying viral marketing emerged from the mismatch between my objects of study: my informants' voluntarily shared ads, but they often did this without being aware of, nor caring about this element. Furthermore, boundary-making was tricky since brands were often related, but those relations could vary and were often disputed from one or more sides. Sometimes brands appeared side by side in ads due to collaborations. At other times, links were made as one brand insinuated a relationship to another or referenced it to emphasize itself as the more important one. Finally, brands would figure as potentially related, when neither would confirm or deny suggestions of joint campaigns.

Questions such as: "*What counts as engaging? And to whom?*" and *"How can relations be captured, when they are not the same from all sides?"* became pivotal for the dissertation, as data increasingly brought to attention such ambiguous relations.

The high level of complexities and nuances in boundary-making encountered in the field were not reflected in previous studies directly concerned with viral marketing. Most of those studies were concerned with boundary-making as a matter of word of mouth, pointing to differences of online versus offline as the crucial boundaries. As technologies have become increasingly integrated in daily life, more recent studies have nuanced this. Attention has been directed at different digital platforms, as well as communities facilitated through the internet. However, it rapidly became clear, that the methods of those studies were not suited for capturing the impromptu, fleeting connections between people and brands originating through ad hoc relations rather than through shared platforms or existing communities. Neither did these studies provide insights into temporality where people were only connected through short-lived stories. This called for new analytical tools outside the direct scope of viral marketing studies.

Fan studies suggested putting an emphasis on the double sidedness of content being both spread globally and adapted locally. It further suggested to treat users and producers as collaborators rather than opponents. Game studies provided a boundary-making that directed attention to the concepts of in- and outside particular spheres, suggesting that games serve to bring order and remove ambiguity. Magic circles, for instance, can be seen as shorthand for the concept of a special place in time and space created by a game. Jokes and irony likewise provide spaces where normal rules do not apply. Here the membrane between in- and outside does not insulate one from the other, it exposes them.

Humor, thus, facilitates an ambiguous space where subjects can be touched upon simply for fun and without consequences. Yet at the same time, humor holds the potential for containing serious messages, and it constitutes a powerful tool for providing heavy criticism.

Boundary-makings that allow ambiguities to be emphasized are not just represented in studies of games and jokes as specific genres of communication. Other studies have been concerned with the strategic use of ambiguity in marketing and politics as well. Public relations studies explicitly exemplify the benefits of strategic ambiguity as means for directing attention away from scandals or for enabling creative engagements. Boundary-making is also touched upon in the relationships between users and procures in innovation studies. Studies of user-driven innovation zoom in on users and the role they play in innovation making. These roles vary from users being resources enabling innovators to innovate, to being the source from which innovations emerge. These different approaches to users are interesting in viral reality marketing, because users play both roles, which adds to the complexity. Independently of producers who want to create brand awareness, users engage in practices of referring between various brands through which they become the source of new content. Producers of viral reality campaigns take advantage of this already ongoing reference making, by creating content they hope users will integrate in their practices. Therefore, users are sources of new content that simultaneously become a resource for marketeers, who hope their brand will become part of it.

6.1 New achievements

Collating all these types of boundary-makings with the empirical material calls upon new, refined ways of approaching boundaries adapted to intense, un-orchestrated, ad hoc movements. Previous techniques cannot keep pace with the rapid dissemination occurring in highly digitally mediated, short-lived, and intense cases. Rather than attempting to capture the boundaries, we look to ANT, which suggests removing them altogether instead of modelling them. It provides a framework with emphasis on relations and eliminates distinctions between online and offline, platforms and communities in- and outside games, non-human and human, as well as users and producers.

Combining ANT with future orientation provides useful modes of ordering a means for approaching the field. By visualizing connections that happen, as they happen, without attempts to provide explanation and order through a priori concepts for boundary-making, ANT provides new insights on how to position oneself and collate data; an orientation towards the present. In addition to this, an orientation towards the future seen from the presents, has contributed to a better understanding of

how a present, consisting of potentials and expectations, affects what comes next. Yet the dissertation has shown how, even when positioned in the middle of things, the potential futures are fleeting. Potentials crucial to driving the campaigns forward are highly likely to disappear rapidly. As opposed to an orientation towards present and future, fire objects suggest an orientation towards what is necessarily *not* present. This provides an alternative boundary-making that raises the question of what any object is made up of, and what must necessarily be absent for it to be present. Highly digitally mediated, suddenly shifting relations are fleeting yet important to capture. Giving specific attention to the temporal present, potential future, and relationships between absences and presences are powerful tools when approaching quickly changing phenomena.

Ambiguity, which is a crucial element in viral reality marketing, calls for specific attention. ANT however, fails to provide nuances on things that are several things at the same time, or are considered the same from one side while different from another. Fluidity provides a different way of thinking about these, as well as about exclusions and relations that contain ambiguity. Boundaries are expanded in this framework as things are considered more loosely connected, since they are practices that do not map on to each other but instead coexist while depending on each other, replace one other, or directly conflict.

The dissertation thoroughly discussed three main areas: positionings in present and future as modes of ordering, ambiguities within the same practices, and concerns for converting things from one time to another when writing. Based on these three discussions, three concepts of importance are emphasized: temporality, potentiality, and ambiguity. They are not concepts that explain what is going on, they are specific areas that need attention. This attention is crucial both while in the field, when analyzing, as well as when translating empirical material into a story.

6.1.1 Temporality

Whenever we speak of something having gone viral, the terms, *shared*, *spread*, and *reaching across boundaries*, become inevitable parts of the description. Boundaries, therefore, are highly relevant since they work as an opposition to something viral, presenting barriers, which must be overcome if we are to understand the viral aspect. As seen in chapter two, in most of the literature, boundaries exist between relatively stable groups of actors and their relations. Such boundaries can be cultural, geographical, or even point to translation between different digital platforms or between online and offline. Groups with shared interests, collaborations between fans and artists, content in need of being adapted as it travels from one culture to another, and practices around a specific diagnosis, are all

examples of areas where specific boundary-making helps explain and order phenomena across which things are shared. However, the empirical data of the fieldwork of this dissertation has shown how content that emerges suddenly is held together by a different type of alliances. These alliances consist of numerous, highly temporary connections between people, who are not necessarily intricately connected on any digital platforms – indeed they may not even know each other in advance.

Analytically capturing these connections is achieved with an explicit orientation towards a present, which occurs without warning and is both fragile and fleeting. If we only look for shared interests or platforms, then we cannot even perceive the people connected through specific combinations of time and references. Real time marketing and viral reality marketing content are driven by such abrupt, brief connections, and the features that manage to temporarily unite people as a group are unpredictable. Not everyone will recognize the beauty or humor of some specific juxtaposition or combination of references. Content is often held together by un-orchestrated, ad hoc relations, existing through strong in- and exclusion. Thus, we must shift focus away from boundary-making between stable, existing categorizations and orderings, if we are to catch those fleeting connections.

6.1.2 Potentiality

ANT is useful in pinpointing relations and visualizing fragile, temporary connections. Its orientation towards the present makes it highly suitable for capturing interactions and short-lived connections as they happen – connections which might subsequently be lost. However, this is not sufficient, and the empirical data calls for yet another orientation: the future as seen from the present. Through studies of future orientation and expectation, I have pinpointed the necessity of paying explicit attention to futures, since they are not only performative, but also accumulative.

By paying attention to expectations and potential outcomes of campaigns, we immediately see a feedback loop. In their attempt to shed light on *what* they are engaging with, people exchange opinions and play detectives, thereby generating new references. And these new references give rise to new potential outcomes, which in turn generate more curiosity and spur increased participation. Potentials serve as a driving force here; they maintain or increase the momentum, thus ensuring the campaign's continuation. The participants add to the ambiguity in their attempt to eliminate it.

Studies of future orientation and expectations provide useful insights into alternative modes of ordering while in the field, but this is not their only contribution. They also provide input to the discussion on how to treat elements that are part of the same practice, while at the same time changing it. Expectations both drive the stories and change them. The specific attention to future orientation

and expectations highlight dependencies between potential futures and new ones. This approach directs attention to subsequent versions. The retrospective linearity of events that are constructed in narratives explaining the success or failure of a given innovation is quite different from the linearity seen when viewing the future from the present. These opposite-directed linearities point to versions sharpening the contexts of succeeding versions. By focusing on dependencies between versions rather than seeing them as coexisting, we can visualize their interdependence and illuminate how one version, which may no longer exist, has given rise to another. In retrospective accounts, unfulfilled expectations and potential futures that did not manifest, may be rendered invisible. Only by explicitly representing the potential futures of a past present, are we able to see how versions accumulate new stories.

The driving force in viral reality marketing is the continuous addition of new elements to the story. The result of participants trying to create order and closure is simply increased fragmentation. In this setting, the researcher's task of making sense of and ordering the field is no different from that of the informants. Both navigate the stories as they develop. The fact that the researcher is not mapping the network from above but is inside it may be a theoretical point. But it also contains a lesson in the novel insights that can be gleaned when the object of study is made up of potentials, and the researcher must gather data with no clarity on the situation. Performing fieldwork where neither informants nor ethnographer knew what was going on, has been a privileged position for understanding sudden, unpredictable, and intense developments. Being in the middle of it, captures and illuminates how campaigns are strategically orchestrated from multiple sides simultaneously.

Stating the importance of being oriented towards potential futures and the necessity of paying specific attention to potential is easily done. But actually doing so in a field where potentials are the driving force this is not an easy task. It requires the ethnographer to navigate in an overflow of information without knowing what will later turn into more stabilized or agreed upon interpretations and outcomes. This requires a different kind of approach that is both disciplined and yet constantly open to the unexpected and incoherent. The core lessons of performing fieldwork "in the thick of it" with all the ambiguity and lack of clarity of the informants is, not to strive for answers and not to discard unconfirmed, seemingly irrelevant, or disputed relations. Ordering the field in the field requires a shift of mindset. Explicitly seeking out potentials and meeting connections with curiosity, rather than insisting that they are mutually agreed upon, can provide novel and unanticipated insights. This holds for potential futures of any kind; people's dreams, plans and predictions.

6.1.3 Ambiguity

Viral reality marketing gives rise to highly intense settings with great, but unconfirmed, potential, or ambiguous positions. When the object of study holds great potential, the subsequent analysis and representation demands attention to ambiguity due to the retrospective nature of the task.

Ambiguity is a recurring theme throughout this dissertation. From the initial data to the analysis and representation, these ambiguous relations play an integral part; these are all ambiguities originating from differing times and positionings. We must pay explicit attention to the temporality in which ambiguous relations exists as well as the fractal positions from which they arise.

If we look at the participants, we see that there are different groups. There are those who passionately believe their specific interpretation, based on their knowledge at the time. Others actively assume ambiguity and play along. Both contribute to the momentum of campaigns, but if treated analytically the same, we miss crucial points in the dynamics between the two groups. Ambiguity is part of the game for those playing along, whereas for those who engage with a clear perception that their interpretation is true, that ambiguity is non-existent. These variations between informants show us how ambiguity may relate to a story being practiced by multiple people, when these people are not analytically distinguished. Ambiguity may not be agreed upon from all sides.

Thus, ambiguity does not serve as an explanatory concept in the dissertation. On the contrary, even ambiguity itself becomes ambiguous when we begin to question when and where something is ambiguous. The picture is different if we view ambiguity as a fluid object instead. Then, in some practices, the analyst may use the concept to illustrate diversity among participants. In others, the brands use ambiguity as the driving force to generate attention. And this is where modes of ordering and ambiguity as part of several practices simultaneously enlighten us.

Consider that some of the ambiguities pinpointed through analysis were not so at the time they were performed; people believing the mother's story was true, people believing it was an actress' self-promotion, as well as people believing it was an ad. If these three versions are analytically juxtaposed as different practices around the same story, we miss that the informants may not have experienced the story as ambiguous. They might individually have been convinced that they engaged with something clearly fake, or clearly genuine, respectively. The version with the actress depended on her being revealed as an actress, which happened at a later point. If these versions are treated analytically as part of the same, this introduces an ambiguity that did not exist. Therefore, when using ambiguity as a mode of ordering, we must be aware that fusing disparate versions into a single "same"

is an analytical achievement that may not reflect the informants' experiences at the time. Thus, the first crucial point regarding using ambiguity, is that **it can be created analytically and projected back in time**, which introduces retroactive ambiguity.

Counter to ambiguities retrospectively made visible through analytical juxtapositions, ambiguities encountered in the field (for example, a story that may or may not be true), are later in danger of being removed. Consider that time has passed, and it has been revealed that everything was part of a campaign. This ambiguity is an achievement of the informants' concerns from before it was known to be an ad, which may not make it into the analyst's accounts. Thus, **we can unintentionally remove ambiguities that existed** but no longer do.

Finally, we need to remember that the ethnographer's practices in pinpointing ambiguities as well as **creating order is an enactment**, just as the informants create order and determine what is clear and what is ambiguous. The researcher may have privileged information and be in a position to say that engagements with a story are all part of a campaign. But at the same time, the differing, incorrect interpretations, and thus ordering of informants must still be taken seriously. Directing attention to those who believe in the story of the mother, through the analytical lens of it being a practice around a campaign, is not only an issue of informants not fitting in, but also an insight in their different boundary-making that may be crucial as a different order.

A disciplined lack of clarity may be to treat the recurrent theme of ambiguity as something consisting of many practices throughout this dissertation. In treating ambiguity as a fluid object, we can focus on where ambiguity is practiced, by whom, and at what times.

Methodologically, this ambiguity provided a position from where things that are both the same yet different simultaneously became relevant. Thus, ambiguity as a mode of ordering while in the field allows for seemingly incoherent practices to be juxtaposed and included. The intriguing achievements of methodologically exploring ambiguity do not only concern modes of ordering in the field, or in contemplating methods. They reveal a gap between being able to retain openness in which things may potentially be multiple versions, and the dissertation where a story is temporarily fixed and fitted into a narrative with a beginning and an end. Here, ambiguity also emerged from the concerns when writing as a story consisting of multiple stories ordered chronologically according to a particular timeline, when informants experienced events asynchronously, or when stories were attempted to be explained and narrowed down despite the fact that they multiplied and grew because of this feature.

The importance of avoiding cleaning up all the achieved fluidity into a fixed and coherent narrative needs attention. Therefore, writing as a mode of ordering, and the gap between disciplined lack of clarity around data and methods, get closure in a chronological text. This requires awareness too, to make sure we are not unintentionally cleaning up all the mess by turning it all into a coherent story.

6.2 Future work - Approaching the field from elsewhere

More and more movements arise from decentralized, temporal networks made up of ad hoc relations that unite people in joint causes. Alliances made around Me too, I Can't Breathe, doubts about the legitimacy of voting systems, or the effects of face masks, social distancing, or vaccines during a pandemic, demonstrate the power that lies in these temporary networks that facilitate large scale changes in attitudes. It also shows how attention to ambiguity, temporality, and potentiality are useful ways of approaching such phenomena. Yet, specifically in these fast emerging, intensive, and often short-lived cases, we need to be oriented towards the temporal as well as spatial position of the researcher as well as informants. We must not unintentionally erase ambiguities where they exist nor create them where they do not. We need to ask: *Is the ambiguity a construct made by the researcher? Is the ambiguity something that is perceived by all participants? Are ambiguities lost in translation in retrospective accounts?* The researcher must be conscious and cautious of not accidentally introducing non-existent order by pointing to ambiguities without orientation in time and place.

Following the new contemplations of ambiguity from where, and to whom it exists paves the way for another question: *From which position are these claims made, and which opportunities are there for positioning oneself differently?* Despite just having claimed that more and more movements arise from social media, critically we need to ask whether this is actually the case. We need to ask how one gets in a position to make such a claim.

Firstly, do I see a growth in such movements because I become more experienced and know what to look for? As an ethnographer gathering data, I have increasingly experienced that I recognize more and more elements, which my informants do not notice or are not acquainted with. I recognize patterns and have become more sensitive to new tendencies. This raises the question of how to determine that a claimed increase in movements is not simply an increased personal awareness. Secondly, to what extent am I able to be positioned elsewhere, outside my own network of relations? This is partly a matter of the omnipresent digital mediation and algorithmic ranking of all my activities, and partly due to the kinds of relations in my personal network that I create intentionally.

Even though I have shown how digital mediations are far from neutral, there are ways to actively take control and advantage over them. If I were to do this study anew, I would try to access data differently by not only interacting in settings strongly affected by algorithms that take my personal relations as input for content exposure. I would actively consider IT tooling, such as scripts or monitoring devices, allowing a different access to data. This is not a new idea: Parallel to this dissertation, a 2-year masters in techno anthropology has been offered in Denmark since 2011, with specific emphasis on solving complex socio-technical problems with multiple stakeholders from private, public, and civil organizations in different professional areas. Out of this came TANTlab[39], a research group of techno anthropologists with specific attention to science and technology studies. These techno anthropologists have been concerned with the use, as well as visualization, of digitally driven data gathering. These institutions already engage experimentally with tools and methods for harvesting and analyzing messy social data online, to provide various types of visualizations. Yet, whereas these researchers are still concerned with exploring the everyday life of people, using technologies as tools, and reinventing and adapting tools like ethnographers have always done, this dissertation brings a different scope in directly chasing phenomena that emerge unexpectedly and through short lived connections. Using tailored programs to collect and collate data is an extension of doing ethnography and requires rethinking as well. One requirement is knowing the local language, which here may be the programming language. Being able to understand web technologies provides some clarity into the inner workings of webpages, and may reveal information, such as filters that conceal particular words or block users.

In addition to this already established work in the space between retooling ethnography, STS, and visualization, this dissertation makes way for adding a specific focus on suddenly emerging movements, and an opportunity to study the unpredictable and the incoherent, while drawing upon a lab with resources, access to digital tools for mapping, monitoring, and visualizing, as well as software expertise.

Another intriguing move would be to ally with a company like Overskrift.dk that makes a living out of the unpredictable, by providing services that mitigate the risks of shit storms and cyber bullying. These companies monitor emerging trends, thereby quickly noticing the unpredictable. They provide advance warning and advice on actions before things grow and get out of hand. Such a collaboration would provide access to emerging trends external to the researcher's own network while allowing for

[39] https://www.tantlab.aau.dk/

an earlier access to unpredictable events. This access would go beyond my personal relations in capturing things based on increased use of hashtags and locating trending terms used across several social media platforms independent on my specific position and connections.

Actively using software tools for monitoring and mapping tendencies and upcoming trends on social media represents a new promising way of transgressing the inherent boundaries that limit the researcher's personal sphere of specific network connections and interests. Technology may capture and analyze more data from alternative sources where the researcher otherwise has no access. This can shed light on patterns that the researcher could never find and is an obvious next step. Retooling ethnography with digital monitoring to approach emerging trends may be promising. Yet this approach will also require awareness of what is being monitored, as well as how, and positioning would need to be questioned. Monitoring will reflect what it is designed to map. Therefore, careful consideration of the technical design is pivotal.

Whereas ANT suggests that no one is ever outside or above any network, there *are* ways to be elsewhere. There are ways to be outside one's personal position. Yet, this does not provide a neutral position, simply one that is different. The question is not a matter of which method is best, but a matter of exploring the worlds that each of them produces. Monitoring data across social media or in specific times and places using software are not *better* ways to get to know what is going on. They are *different types of access* that can highlight patterns otherwise inaccessible or hidden to the researcher deeply integrated in her own network. Likewise, potentiality, ambiguity, and temporality are not *better* areas than diffusion or translation. However, in highly mediated settings with cacophonies of voices and no overall orchestration from a single site, they provide new insights. These concepts enable us to *shift to new practices* that take the chaos, the resisting informants, and the conflicting objects, without a priori making things absent to create an order.

Novel insights may be uncovered through the use of ambiguity, potentiality, and temporality. Having these concepts specifically in mind encourages attention to phenomena and interactions that are difficult to grasp and might otherwise be seen as uncomfortable inconveniences when focusing on the object of study. Like disciplined lack of clarity, deliberately looking for temporalities, potential, and ambiguity helps to have a focus while at the same time encouraging uncertainty, open ends, and multiple possible versions. This is useful when attending to matters that are both sudden, intensive, highly digitally mediated, and subject to massive attention. It is a methodological move towards

embracing messy, ambiguous data, a pivotal shift from analysts and writers fighting against data; incoherent data as well as data resisting the narrative can be explored and give rise to new insights.

In conclusion, this dissertation has demonstrated the challenges in telling a story that does not want to be told. The contribution of this dissertation is to show how it is possible to study things that happen suddenly, that are not orchestrated, that are very distributed, networked and highly mediated. These results are more and more relevant, despite the practices of viral reality marketing having become rare. We increasingly face situations, in which researchers along with journalists, comedians, politicians, and advertisers drop everything to attend to a specific reconfiguration, in which things run out of hand in accelerated, unexpected, and completely unpredictable ways, in which things explode. This dissertation is a methodological as well as practical contribution for people whose object of study is brief but intense, including the retrospective representation of it.

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This dissertation has been long in the making. It was challenged by long lasting illness, close encounters with anxiety, and life in general happening. A slow process, occasionally down prioritized or paused when such things took precedence. This is how life sometimes goes and I have accepted this. The greatest challenge was not these unplanned breaks with little time to jot down the current train of thought. Nor was it picking up again where I had left off, reconstructing those thoughts.

The main difficulty was the solitude. Working alone made it difficult to distinguish the trivial observations from the inspired insights. I truly missed that most important part of scientific work: The interaction with others. Being able to view your ideas through the eyes of another not only helps to validate the good ones; that interaction is the whetstone on which novel ideas are honed.

I have learnt much from the valuable comments and responses of the reading committee and even more from my supervisors' continuous comments. They have been the stand-in for the multitude of colleagues that one would normally spar with. The biggest lesson of them all is that the greatest insights are gained through collaboration, discussion, and criticism.

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Curriculum Vitae

Dina was born in Aarhus May 1980.

From 1997 to 1999 she attended Highschool at Langkær Gymnasium.

From 2000 till 2001 she was enrolled in Brazilian Studies at Aarhus University, to qualify for entry to study Anthropology.

She received her BA. in Anthropology from Aarhus University in 2003 for her work on *"Nurses' concerns for documentation versus care."* This included two months of fieldwork among nurses in three different types of hospital wards.

As part of her Master's studies, she was a visiting scholar at Virtual Knowledge Studio, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences from 2007 to 2008.

In 2008 she finished her MA. in Anthropology at Aarhus University. The thesis was entitled: "*The Dilemma of Standardisation versus Local Adaptation in Electronic Patient Records.*" This was based on eight months of fieldwork among the diverse groups engaged in the development and use of an electronic health care records system. Informants included politicians and software engineers, as well as nurses and doctors from different types of hospital wards.

She continued to pursue a PhD on viral marketing in virtual worlds in a project collaboration between Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy at Copenhagen Business School and Virtual Worlds Sensemaking and User-Driven Innovation at Roskilde University. After periods of illness, she continued her studies at Leiden University where she proposed her dissertation in 2022.

ii

http://youtu.be/TeibXVNoM8E

Star Wars according to 3 year old (with clips)

by **SuperTrekNerd** • 5 years ago • 830,822 views

For the original see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBM854BTGL0 All credit for this video should go to ...

"Star Wars according to a 3 year old" parody.

by **RawVegasDotTV** • 5 years ago • 462,518 views

Here is a 23 year old explaining a 3 year old's explanation of the plot of **Star Wars** Episode IV. http://www.eddiedelmenjian.com/ ...

Star Wars according to Ced

by **beastlyfurbal's channel** • 1 year ago • 92 views

description of **Star Wars**(drunk)

STAR WARS according to Ben from Outnumbered.mpg

by **BobSatchthe2nd** • 3 years ago • 6,886 views

Ben from Outnumbered commentates the action from the first three **Star Wars** films. I do not own the footage used in this video.

Why the Star Wars prequels suck according to Mr. Plinkett (biggest reason why)

by **melanchlorin** • 7 months ago • 9,562 views

Mr. Plinkett (Mike Stoklasa) exposes the very core of why the prequels suck imo. Please check out all three full prequel reviews at ...

HD

Star Wars According To Me: All Six Movies Ranked and Reviewed

by **LFStreviews** • 6 months ago • 1,032 views

I am a **Star Wars** nut. These are my opinions. Don't ask me what I think of the buyout because the jury in my head is still out.

Star Wars According to The Chill

by **WCWe** • 2 weeks ago • 67 views

HD

Star Wars According to Emma

by **samstruth's channel** • 1 month ago • 134 views

"And everyone lives happily ever after in the Earwax village!" "Is that it?" "Isn't that all that happens?"

star wars is evil (according to religous zealots)

by **Aaron McKenna** • 6 years ago • 335,555 views

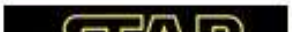
hilarious.

Star Wars according to Ashleigh

by **Stephanie Crouch** • 9 months ago • 65 views

Ashleigh gives us her summary of **Star Wars**.

HD

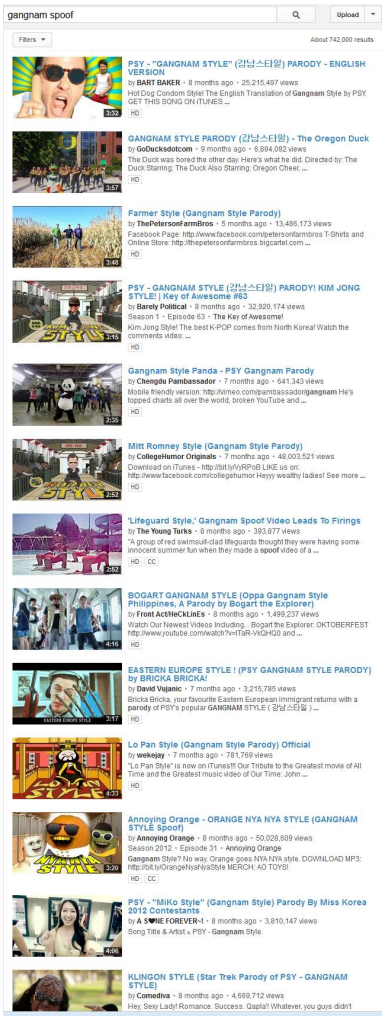


NEW STAR WARS FILMS!? -- Disney Buys LucasFilm for $4

iv

Shown here are 13 out of 7.42,00 results on Gangnam Spoofs, but 10 months after the release of the original video the list gets bigger by the hour still.

V



vi

This clip contains 43 minutes of a frog just sitting on a bench. Nothing happens at all. However, the video as of May 29, 2013 received 10,733,920 views. When searching on YouTube thousands of versions of this frog with varying degree of alterations in soundtrack and editing appear. Not to mention videos that carries a reference through the title and tags only while showing "fat lady sitting on bench – like a human", "midget sitting on bench- like a human" To guys sitting on bench – like a boss" "frog sitting on a bench with Tupac" just to mention a few.

A Frog Sitting on a Bench Like a Human
by **RoltonB** • 1 year ago • 10,733,920 views
What a Wonderful World http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWRB6dfME7Y
Hello My Baby, Hello My Honey, Hello My Ragtime ...

vii

viii

The original video was entitled “Sitting on a bench like a human”, suggesting that the frog sat as if it was a human. However, “Like a boss” is both a title that makes a reference to “like a human” but it is also in itself a meme and a catch phrase often used in images that feature a person completing an action with authority and finesse. It is similar to the way slang is used in regular language, to do something cool – Like a boss! References, such as “like a boss,” are subtle in- and exclusions of others. If you are not familiar with the reference, you might not share a video of the frog with nothing, but the title changed from “like a human” to “Like a boss”. Yet if you have spent some time on social media watching where memes get shared, there is a chance you recognize the meme “like a Boss.” And appreciate the creative inclusion of that meme. Thus, there are many layers of references, and to create amusing content you need to master making the right references with the right timing. This requires knowing what references others might recognize and, as an informant put it, “know your classics”.

That a video becomes viral, or is subjected to billions of views, cannot be understood without extending boundaries to include references since there is well established genre of making cross over. Such references need to be understood in relation to how they serve to make and break connections between those who exchange them.

ix

For a few versions gathered as an example click here:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfFP8Dz243Zkc91DmPZmRYWU50MpMjZ3h
This is my locally stored videos that hopefully will stay there. However, should YouTube, or the film company behind Der Untergang decide that these parodies are no longer desirable, I have no way of securing them.

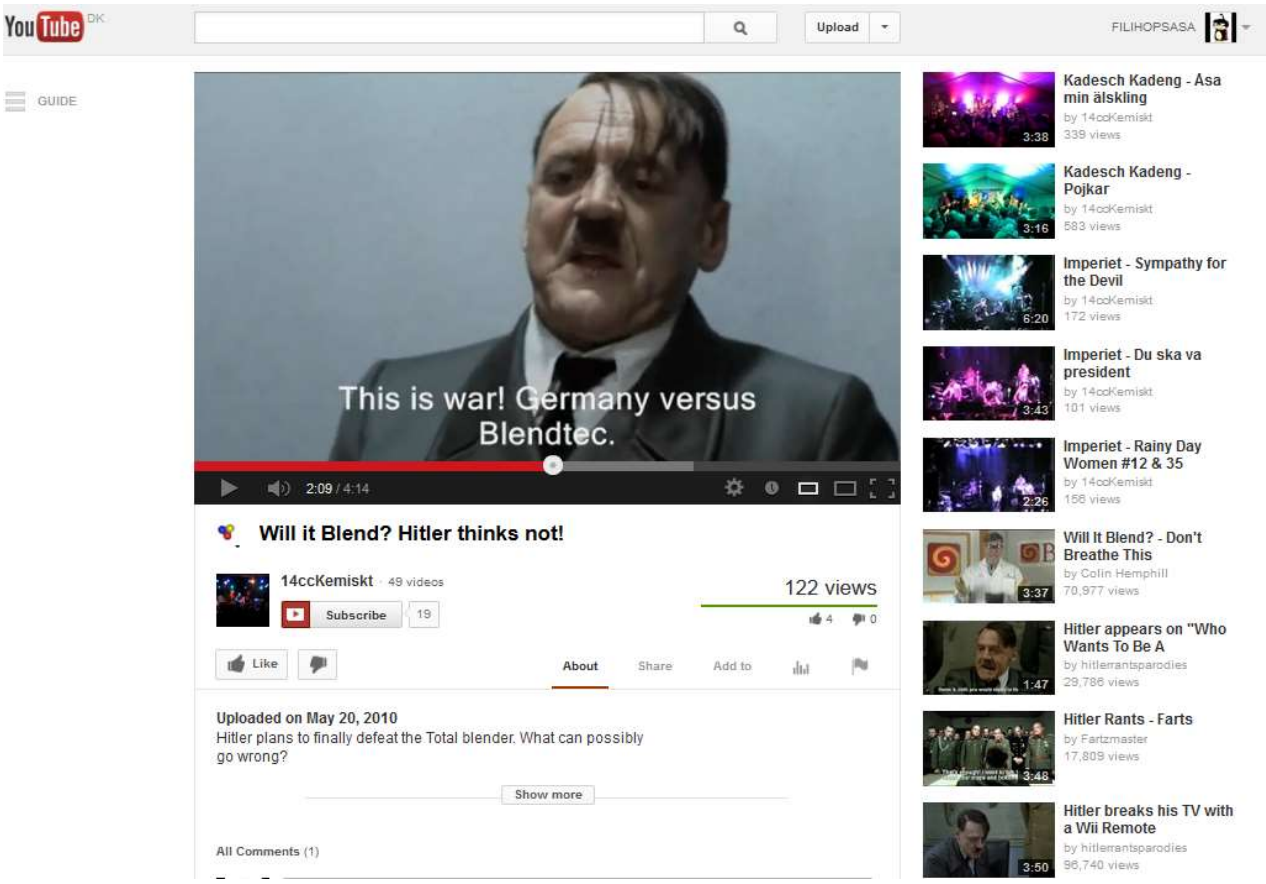
x

To see a colection of these, I made a playlist featuring the most frequently encountered parodies during fieldwork: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfFP8Dz243Zkc91DmPZmRYWU50MpMjZ3h

xi

Pepsi supporting Obama through their logo (Davisson and Booth 2010)

xii


YouTube DK
Upload
FILIHOPSASA
GUIDE
This is war! Germany versus Blendtec.
2:09 / 4:14
Will it Blend? Hitler thinks not!
14ccKemiskt · 49 videos
Subscribe 19
122 views
4 0
Like
About Share Add to
Uploaded on May 20, 2010
Hitler plans to finally defeat the Total blender. What can possibly go wrong?
Show more
All Comments (1)
Kadesch Kadeng - Åsa min älskling
by 14ccKemiskt
339 views
3:38
Kadesch Kadeng - Pojkar
by 14ccKemiskt
583 views
3:16
Imperiet - Sympathy for the Devil
by 14ccKemiskt
172 views
6:20
Imperiet - Du ska va president
by 14ccKemiskt
101 views
3:43
Imperiet - Rainy Day Women #12 & 35
by 14ccKemiskt
156 views
2:26
Will It Blend? - Don't Breathe This
by Colin Hemphill
70,977 views
3:37
Hitler appears on "Who Wants To Be A
by hitlerrantsparodies
29,786 views
1:47
Hitler Rants - Farts
by Fartzmaster
17,809 views
3:48
Hitler breaks his TV with a Wii Remote
by hitlerrantsparodies
96,740 views
3:50

xiii

xiv

HOW TO SURVIVE A HEART ATTACK WHEN YOU ARE ALONE??

Since many people are alone when they suffer a heart attack, without help,the person whose heart is beating improperly and who begins to feel faint, has only about 10 seconds left before losing consciousness.

However,**these victims can help themselves by coughing repeatedly and very vigorously. A deep breath should be taken before each cough, and the cough must be deep and prolonged,** as when producing sputum from deep inside the chest.

A breath and a cough must be repeated about every two seconds without let-up until help arrives, or until the heart is felt to be beating normally again.

Deep breaths get oxygen into the lungs and coughing movements squeeze the heart and keep the blood circulating. The squeezing pressure on the heart also helps it regain normal rhythm. In this way, heart attack victims can get to a hospital. Tell as many other people as possible about this. It could save their lives!!

xv

```
Operation UnManifest:
As Anders Behring Breivik wants to use the cruel action of killing over 90 young people to
promote his 1516-page manifesto, also with the help of the internet, Anonymous suggests
following action:
1. Find the Manifest of Anders Behring Breivik : 2083 - A European Declaration of Independence
2. Change it, add stupid stuff, remove parts, shoop his picture, do what you like to.....
3. Republish it everywhere and up vote releases from other peoples, declare that the faked
ones are original
4. Let Anders become a joke, such that nobody will take him serious anymore
5. Spread this message around the internet and real life, translate it
6. Have a moment for the victims of his cruel attacks
We all are anonymous,
We all are Legion,
We all do not forgive murder,
We all do not forget the victims.
```

xvi

Pepsi logo from 1998 to 2006 (Left). Pepsi logo from right before the presidential election) (right)

Turning the Pepsi Logo upside down makes it even more like Obama's logo.

xvii

Transcription of the "Danish Mother Seeking" video

"Hi. My name is Karen and I'm from Denmark. And this here is my baby boy, his name is [laugh and smile to baby] August.

Yeah. I'm doing this video because I'm trying to find August's father. So, if you are out there and you see this, then this is for you. We met one and a half years ago when you were on vacation here in Denmark. And we met at the Custom House Bar. [pause]

I was on my way home and I think you had lost your friends, and then we decided to go down to the water to have a drink, and [pause]

yeah, and this is really embarrassing but that is just more or less what I remember. I don't remember where you're from, or [pause]

I don't even remember your name. [pause]

I do remember, though, we were talking about Denmark and the thing we have here with "hygge" [typical Danish word which more or less translates into "coziness"] that foreign people always ask about. And that's [pause]

yeah, you were really nice, so I guess I decided to show you what "hygge" is all about, because we went back to [pause]

we went back to my house [pause]

and yeah [pause]

we ended up having sex and [pause]

the next morning when I woke up, you were gone. [pause]

It's not that I blame you for anything. And I'm not crazy. Or this is not some kind of obsession that I have with you, I just really, really want to let you know that [pause]

that August is here, that he exists. [pause]

I feel I owe it to both you and to him [pause]

yeah [pause]

and also, I want to let you know that I'm not a bimbo or something like that. I know that August is yours because I haven't been with anybody else since that night [pause]

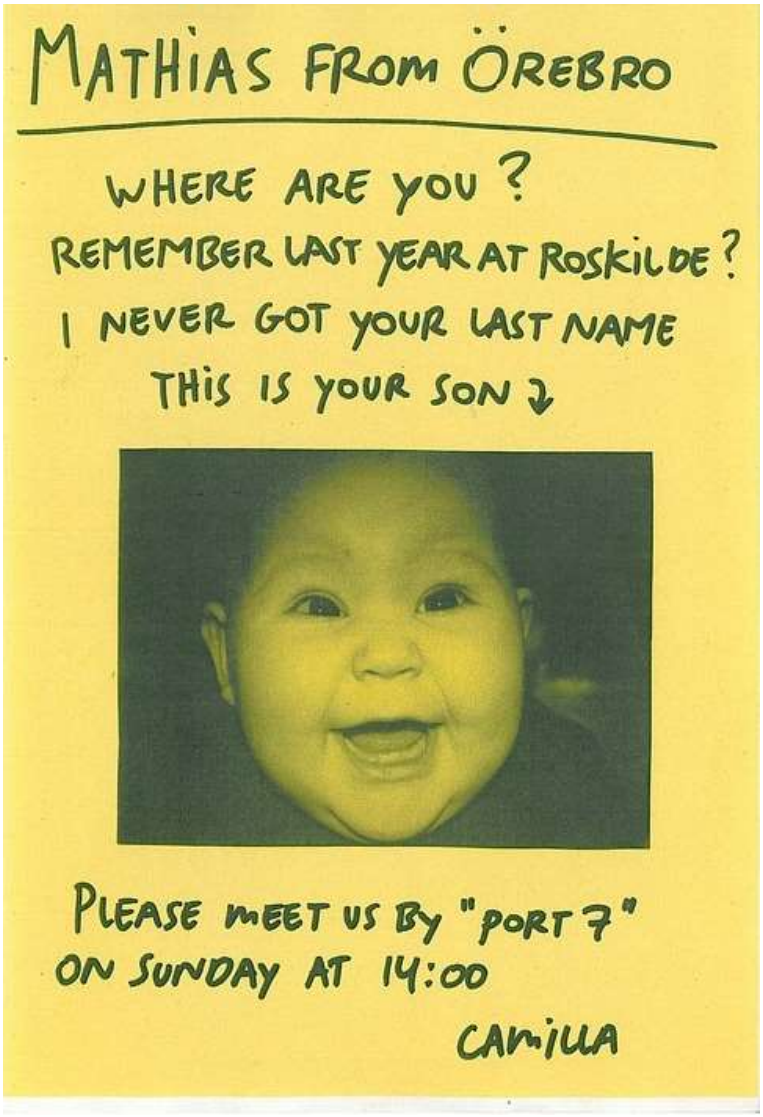
yeah, just so you know that. [pause]

I know that this is really a long shot but if you are out there and you see this, or anybody else who can help me sees this, please contact me. I will put my e-mail with this video; so, just write me [smile]"

[xviii]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NTAV4uTJFo&index=3&list=PLfFP8Dz243Zkc91DmPZmRYWU50MpMjZ3h&t=0s

xix



xx

The definition in Danish: ”Den proces, hvorved man henter viden fra brugerne med henblik på at udvikle nye produkter, services og koncepter. En brugerdreven innovationsproces er baseret på en forståelse af brugerbehov og en systematisk involvering af brugerne”

xxi

Algorithms filtering information based on user input sometimes fails. When on maternity leave, I needed to see whether a specific train route (Lokalbanen Odder) allowed baby carriages on board. Unfortunately, Odder is both the name of the specific train route and a huge brand of baby carriages in Denmark. When googling “Baby carriage”, “Odder”, and “Lokalbanen”, the search algorithm assumed Odder was referring to

the carriage not the train route, and the suggestion was to look for carriages on sale. The search was conducted March 12, 2012 and might have been affected by other searches related to kids and baby equipment. I overcame the restriction of search results by adding quotation marks; this tells the algorithm only to include content as it is written. “Lokalbanen Odder” would require the two words be included right after each other, thereby excluding all pages on baby carriages.

This is a simple intuitive example, yet it illustrates how non-human actors actively make decisions regarding choices of recommended content. Whereas this might be considered a helpful feature, it is at the same time an indicator that algorithms act and interferes with users. Sometimes the feature raises bigger concerns than whether it is a helpful feature of not. For instance, by depicting specific content, the risk is that content regarding larger issues such as politics, wars, elections etc., might indirectly be affected and shaped by the user’s previous input. This is called a filter bubble. A filter bubble can be explained as the state of intellectual isolation that can result from personalized searches, when a website algorithm selectively guesses what information a user would like to see, based on information about the user, such as location, past click-behavior and search history. The concerns regarding the filter bubble are, that as a result user can risk becoming separated from information that disagrees with their viewpoints, thereby effectively isolating them in their own cultural or ideological bubbles.

This illustrates how non-human actors, even without the intensions we normally assign to human actors, act actively to change the way we see and perceive the world. According to ANT actors who act or is acted upon is considered equally relevant to include. In the thought experiment of ANT, algorithms, and users of them should be treated analytically equal since they mutually affect how the other acts. The achievement of this perspective is to make the interplay and mutual affects the two have on each other visible.

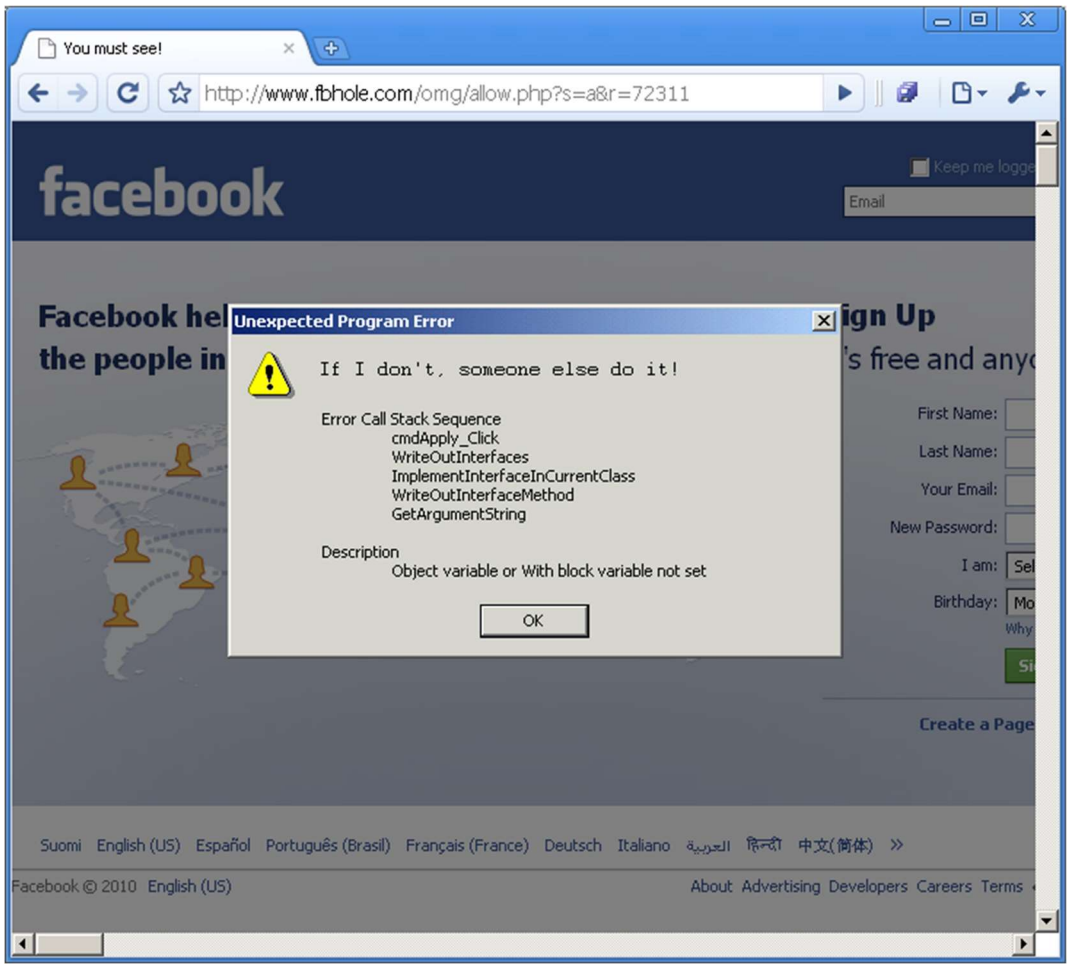
xxii

This might also be called worm referring to a standalone malware computer program that replicates itself to spread to other computers. The term is used by SCIS in this case.

xxiii

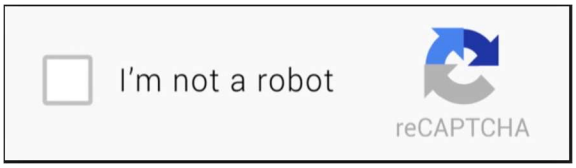

35,171 People Like This
Links
1 link
See All
Create a Page
Report Page
Share
07-02-2011 17:46
35,369 People Like This
Vicki Nordmark
Carina Rosenkilde Andersen
Jacob Jørgensen
Jennifer Lisith
Christine Hansen
Sandra Jeppesen
Links
1 link
See All
Denne kvinde kom 6 år i fængsel pga. denne status
Create a Page
Report Page
Share
07-02-2011 18:00

xxiv



xxv

This is quite normal. It is a feature that ensures that it is a human and not an automatic script (also called a robot) that tries to access the requested site.



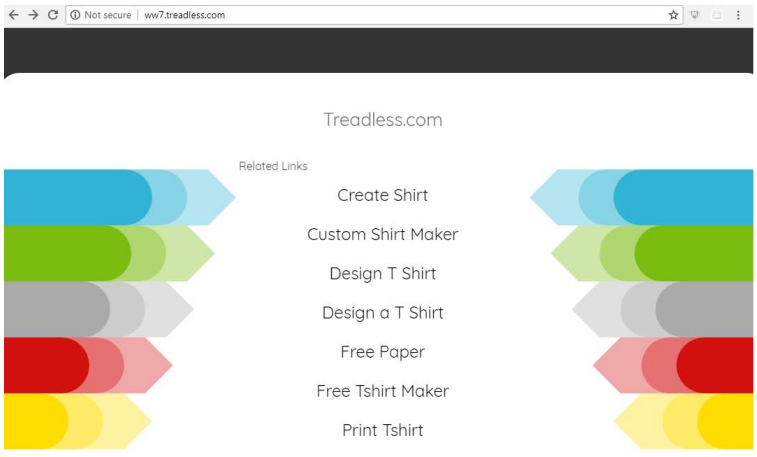
xxvi


ClickHole @ClickHole · 18h
Fighting Back: Facebook Is Mailing Air Horns To All Of Its Users To Blow Whenever They See Fake News clckhl.co/wm5bUB1
28
751
1.3K
A
@A
Follow
@ClickHole So who decides if news is fake? Suckinberg? No thanks. If I cant tell if something is fake or not its my fault for being an idiot
RETWEETS
15
LIKES
14
8:09 PM - 28 Nov 2016
8
15
14

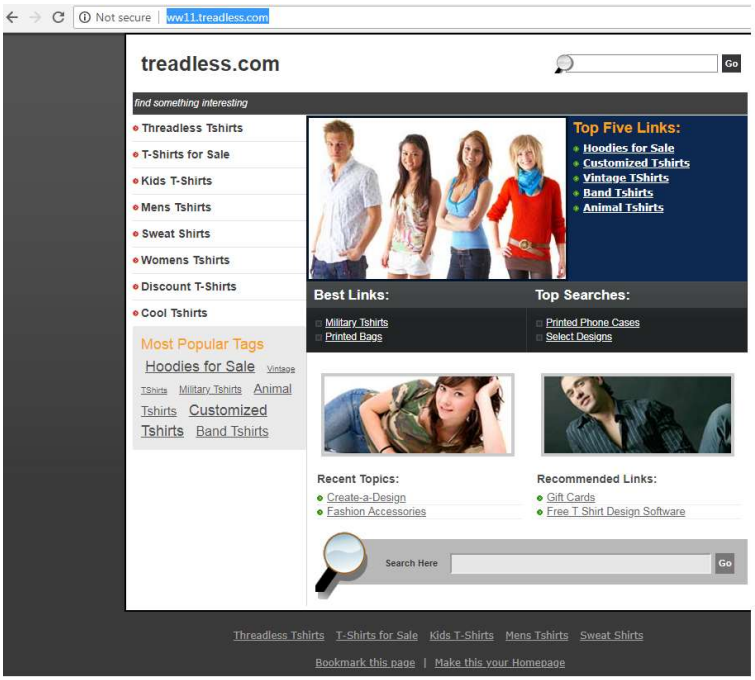
xxvii

The message says: ”KIMs Facebook [page] is temporarily closed due to restructuring. We appologise”

xxviii

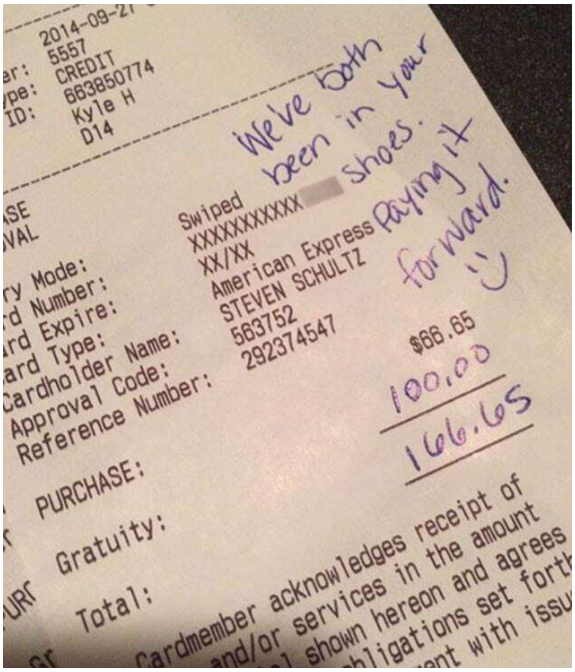


xxix



This page sells traffic. Whenever a user clicks on a link and is directed to another page, the owner of the domain gets a small amount of money for having generated traffic to the site. Further this page sells itself… like Facebook pages before it was forbidden to change a name of the page, it gathered a lot of subscribers, and then was sold. Then someone else overtook the likers and put in his or her own content. www.11.treadless directly offers you to buy the domain, while writing: “you can benefit from the already active traffic and turn it into your own profit”. This could be useful if you own a printing company, or if you want to make money from advertising.

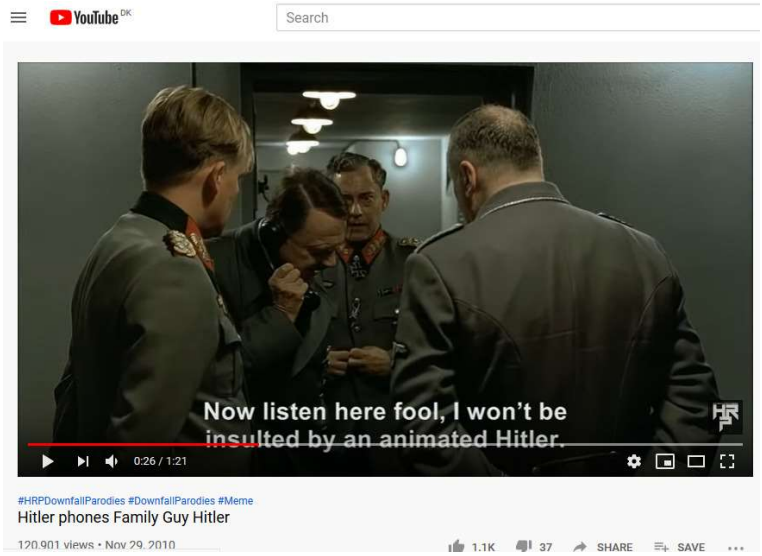
xxx



xxxi

References like Harlem Shake, Goat Edition, Frog sitting on a bench, and remakes of Gangnam style are such examples. They have a short-lived but intense timespans in which they are heavily referenced. Hitler Rants Parodies is one of the few references that has been actively kept alive for a longer period of time, starting in 2006 and as of 2021 is still actively referenced.

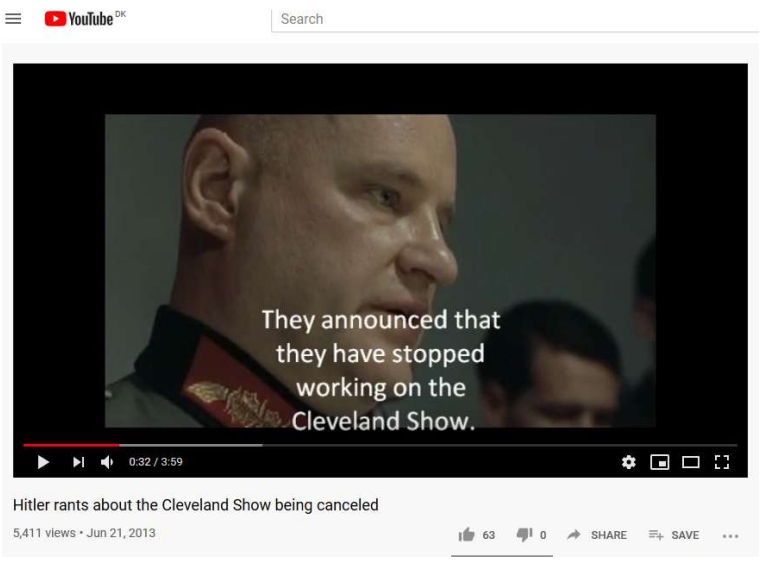
xxxii



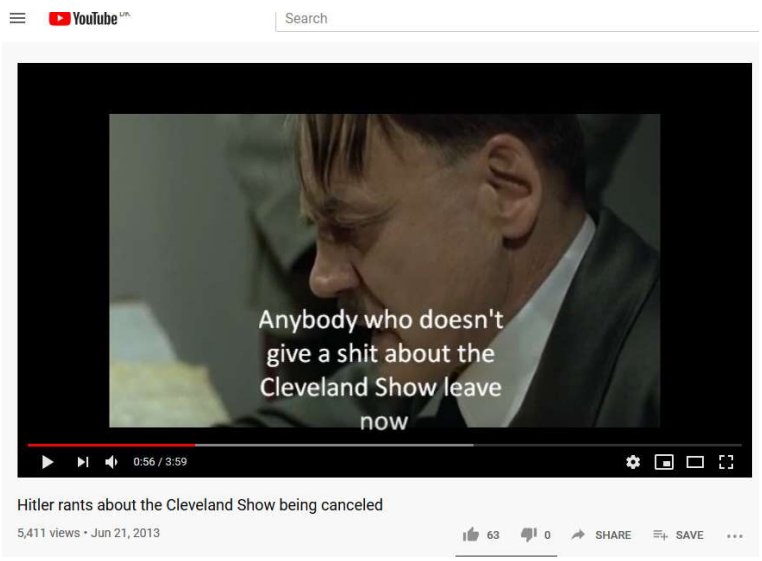
xxxiii

Jews, as well as gay people, have been featured in many episodes of both TV shows in stereotypical ways. For instance, one of the main characters in Family Guy, the baby Stewie, plays homosexual without being labeled so too explicitly. Stewie is well-spoken, with an elaborate vocabulary, an upper-class British accent, and an ambiguous sexual orientation. Continuous jokes during the series involves Stewie and homosexuality. Mort, another character in Family Guy, is portrayed with stereotypically Jewish characteristics, such as his whiny neuroticism, his chronic hypochondria, his wimpy attitude, and his general gawkiness. Mort has terrible social skills, frequently discussing his various maladies and childhood bullying in otherwise polite conversation. The themes of gays and Jews, are recurrent these but come out heavily in the episode “Family Gay.”

xxxiv

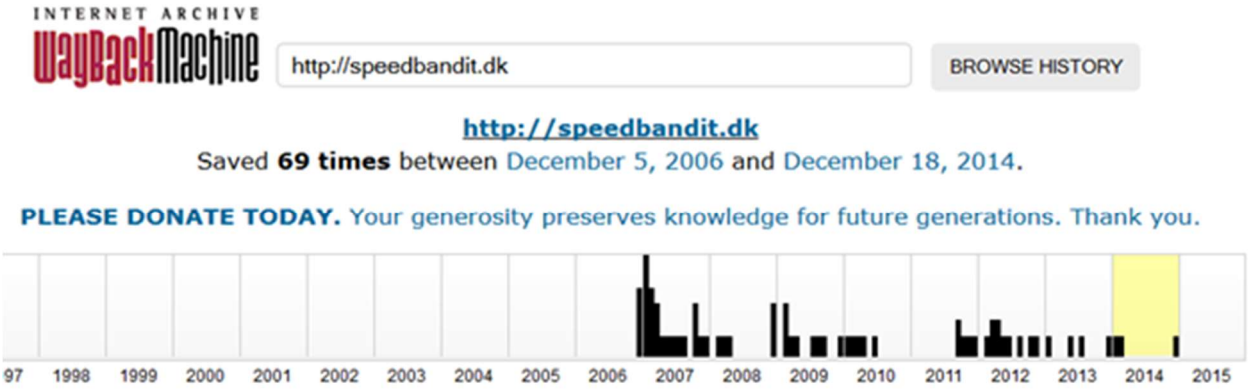

YouTube DK
Search
They announced that they have stopped working on the Cleveland Show.
0:32 / 3:59
Hitler rants about the Cleveland Show being canceled
5,411 views • Jun 21, 2013
63
0
SHARE
SAVE

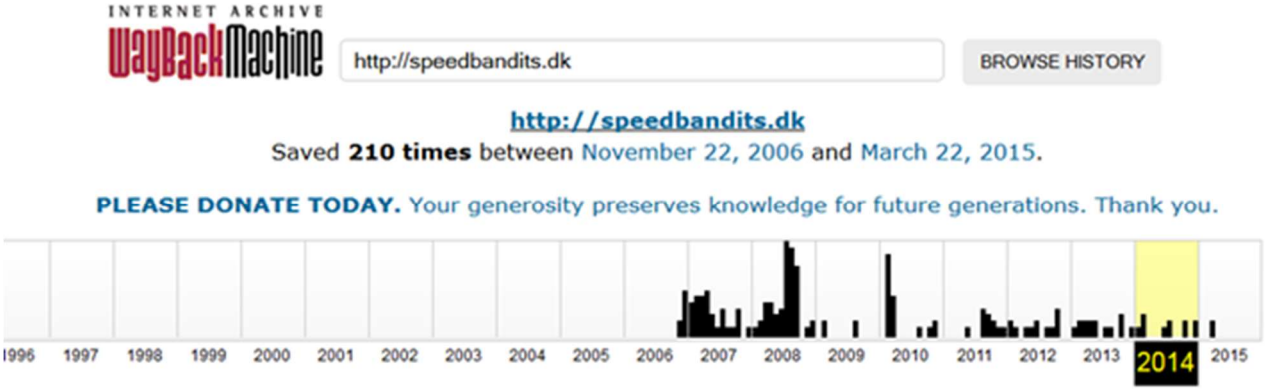
xxxv


YouTube UA
Search
Anybody who doesn't give a shit about the Cleveland Show leave now
0:56 / 3:59
Hitler rants about the Cleveland Show being canceled
5,411 views • Jun 21, 2013
63
0
SHARE
SAVE

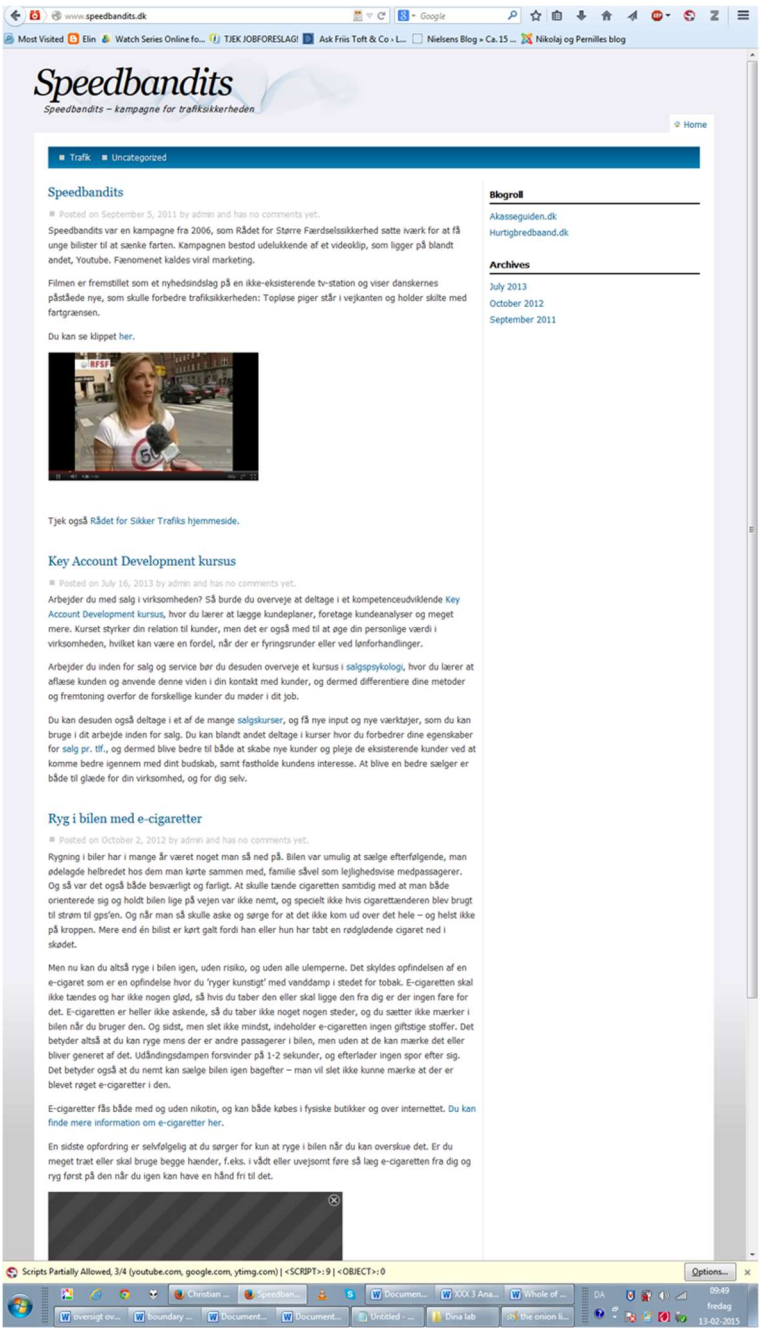
xxxvi

Tools that allow for some form of tracing reveal that both sites have existed for 9 years with continuous updates. The Wayback Machine regularly detect changes and updates while storing screenshots. When finding an archived screenshot, the inks do not work, the digital infrastructure in the page is lost, yet we have access to whether pages have activity, and momentary glimpses into what it looks like at a specific time. There are tools for accessing more information about the owner of the domain as well. Yet most visitors do not know this, or, if they do, they do not spend time on looking up sites.

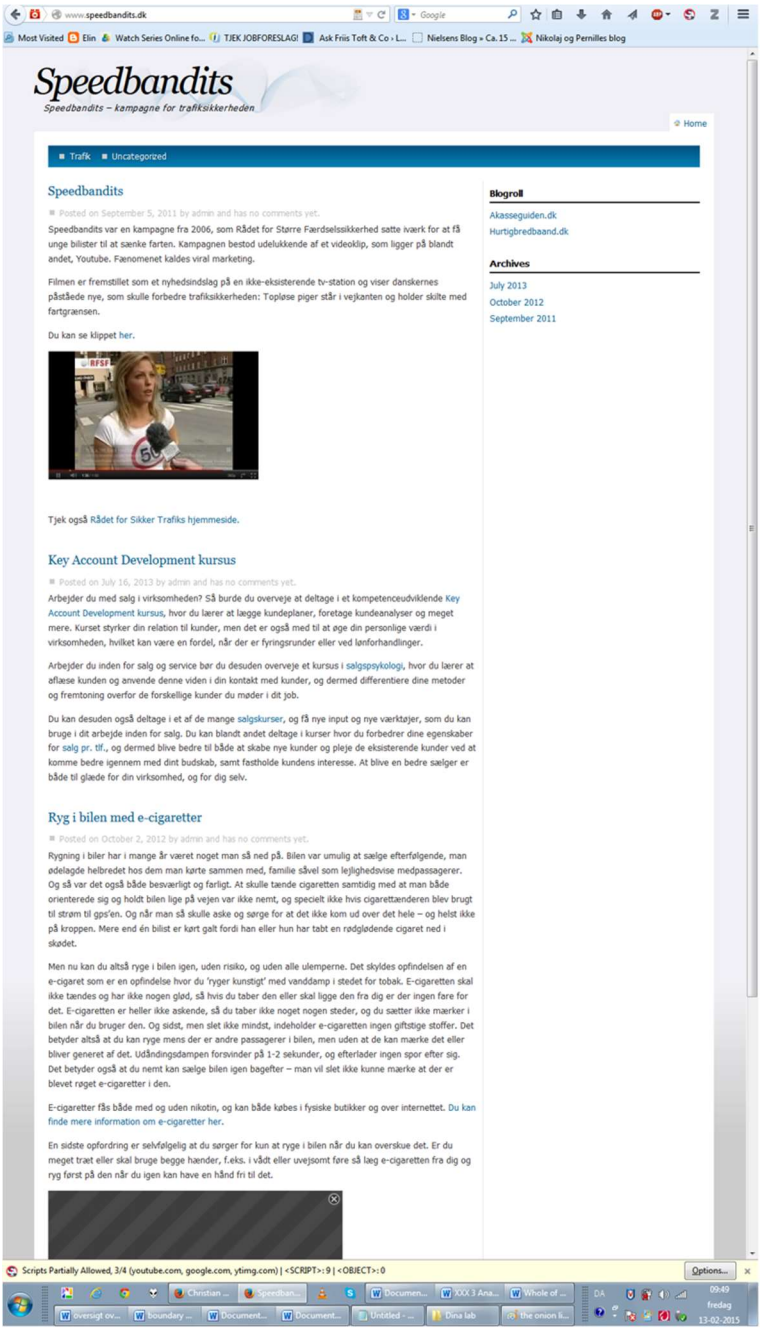




xxxvii


www.speedbandits.dk
Most Visited
Elin
Watch Series Online fo...
TJEK JOBFORESLAG!
Ask Friis Toft & Co › L...
Nielsens Blog » Ca. 15 ...
Nikolaj og Pernilles blog
Speedbandits
Speedbandits – kampagne for trafiksikkerheden
Home
Trafik
Uncategorized
Speedbandits
Posted on September 5, 2011 by admin and has no comments yet.
Speedbandits var en kampagne fra 2006, som Rådet for Større Færdselssikkerhed satte iværk for at få unge bilister til at sænke farten. Kampagnen bestod udelukkende af et videoklip, som ligger på blandt andet, Youtube. Fænomenet kaldes viral marketing.
Filmen er fremstillet som et nyhedsindslag på en ikke-eksisterende tv-station og viser danskernes påståede nye, som skulle forbedre trafiksikkerheden: Topløse piger står i vejkanten og holder skilte med fartgrænsen.
Du kan se klippet her.
Tjek også Rådet for Sikker Trafiks hjemmeside.
Blogroll
Akasseguiden.dk
Hurtigbredbaand.dk
Archives
July 2013
October 2012
September 2011
Key Account Development kursus
Posted on July 16, 2013 by admin and has no comments yet.
Arbejder du med salg i virksomheden? Så burde du overveje at deltage i et kompetenceudviklende Key Account Development kursus, hvor du lærer at lægge kundeplaner, foretage kundeanalyser og meget mere. Kurset styrker din relation til kunder, men det er også med til at øge din personlige værdi i virksomheden, hvilket kan være en fordel, når der er fyringsrunder eller ved lønforhandlinger.
Arbejder du inden for salg og service bør du desuden overveje et kursus i salgspsykologi, hvor du lærer at aflæse kunden og anvende denne viden i din kontakt med kunder, og dermed differentiere dine metoder og fremtoning overfor de forskellige kunder du møder i dit job.
Du kan desuden også deltage i et af de mange salgskurser, og få nye input og nye værktøjer, som du kan bruge i dit arbejde inden for salg. Du kan blandt andet deltage i kurser hvor du forbedrer dine egenskaber for salg pr. tlf., og dermed blive bedre til både at skabe nye kunder og pleje de eksisterende kunder ved at komme bedre igennem med dint budskab, samt fastholde kundens interesse. At blive en bedre sælger er både til glæde for din virksomhed, og for dig selv.
Ryg i bilen med e-cigaretter
Posted on October 2, 2012 by admin and has no comments yet.
Rygning i biler har i mange år været noget man så ned på. Bilen var umulig at sælge efterfølgende, man ødelagde helbredet hos dem man kørte sammen med, familie såvel som lejlighedsvise medpassagerer. Og så var det også både besværligt og farligt. At skulle tænde cigaretten samtidig med at man både orienterede sig og holdt bilen lige på vejen var ikke nemt, og specielt ikke hvis cigarettænderen blev brugt til strøm til gps'en. Og når man så skulle aske og sørge for at det ikke kom ud over det hele – og helst ikke på kroppen. Mere end én bilist er kørt galt fordi han eller hun har tabt en rødglødende cigaret ned i skødet.
Men nu kan du altså ryge i bilen igen, uden risiko, og uden alle ulemperne. Det skyldes opfindelsen af en e-cigaret som er en opfindelse hvor du 'ryger kunstigt' med vanddamp i stedet for tobak. E-cigaretten skal ikke tændes og har ikke nogen glød, så hvis du taber den eller skal ligge den fra dig er der ingen fare for det. E-cigaretten er heller ikke askende, så du taber ikke noget nogen steder, og du sætter ikke mærker i bilen når du bruger den. Og sidst, men slet ikke mindst, indeholder e-cigaretten ingen giftstige stoffer. Det betyder altså at du kan ryge mens der er andre passagerer i bilen, men uden at de kan mærke det eller bliver generet af det. Udåndingsdampen forsvinder på 1-2 sekunder, og efterlader ingen spor efter sig. Det betyder også at du nemt kan sælge bilen igen bagefter – man vil slet ikke kunne mærke at der er blevet røget e-cigaretter i den.
E-cigaretter fås både med og uden nikotin, og kan både købes i fysiske butikker og over internettet. Du kan finde mere information om e-cigaretter her.
En sidste opfordring er selvfølgelig at du sørger for kun at ryge i bilen når du kan overskue det. Er du meget træt eller skal bruge begge hænder, f.eks. i vådt eller uvejsomt føre så læg e-cigaretten fra dig og ryg først på den når du igen kan have en hånd fri til det.
Scripts Partially Allowed, 3/4 (youtube.com, google.com, ytimg.com) | <SCRIPT>:9 | <OBJECT>:0
Options...
09:49
fredag
13-02-2015

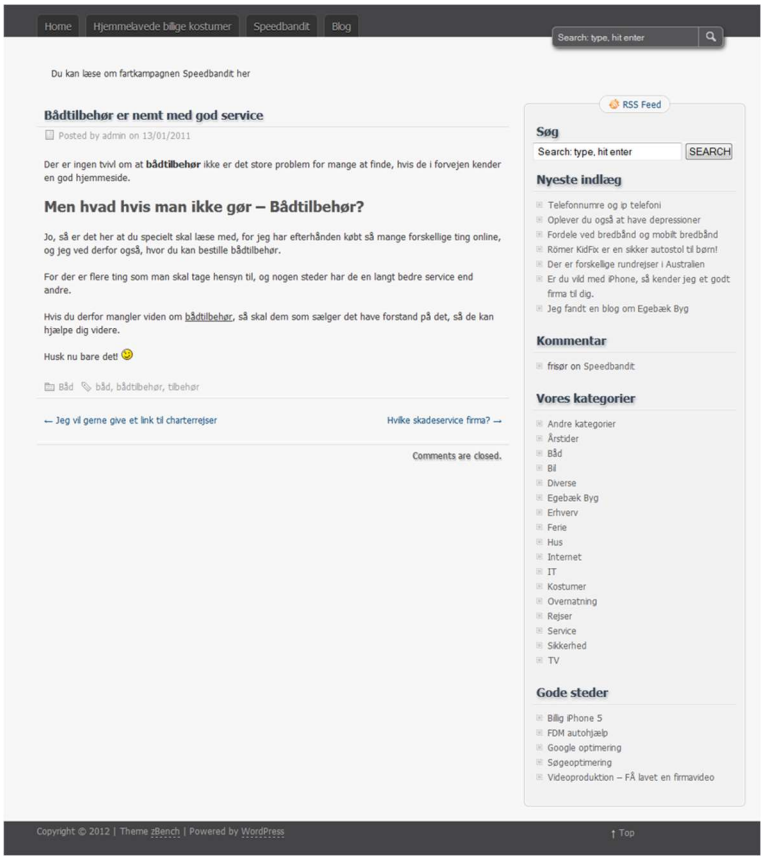
Speedbandits after domain takeover:



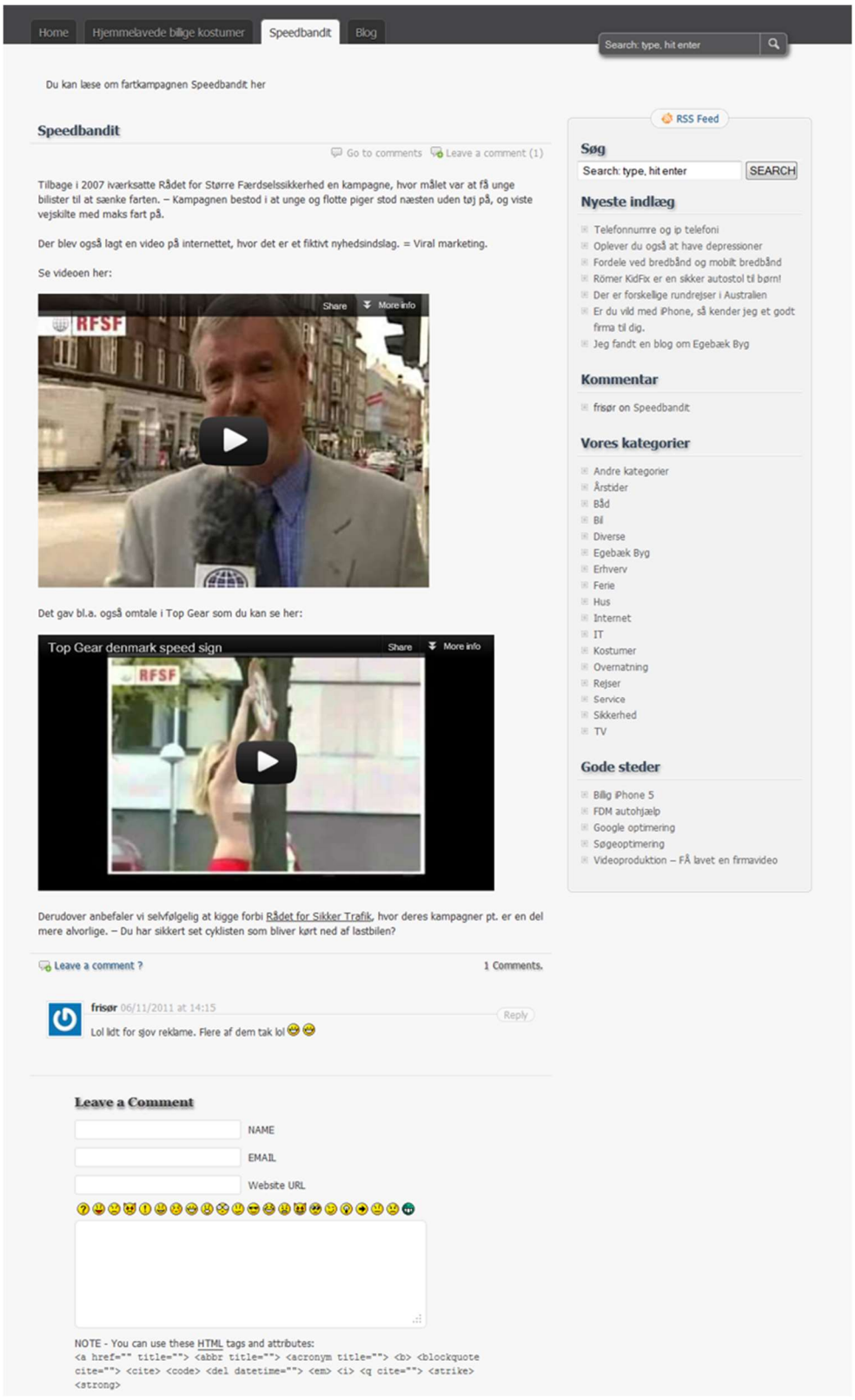
xxxviii

Speedbandit.dk a domain that is similar to Speedbandits and meant to catch those who misspell the URL. The screenshots were from April 18 2012.

Speedbandit.dk:



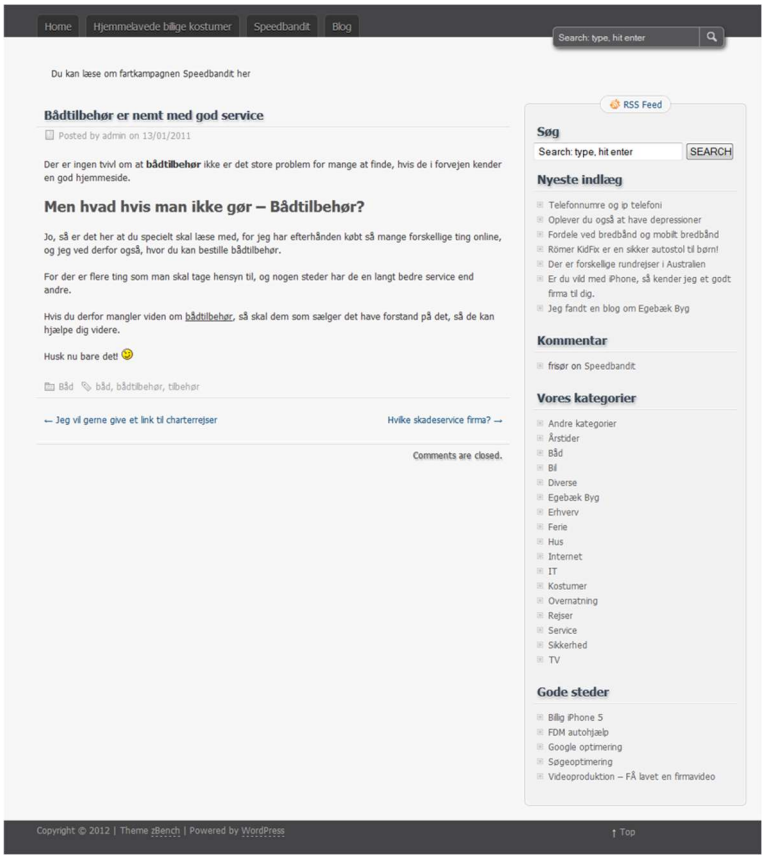
xxxix


Home
Hjemmelavede billige kostumer
Speedbandit
Blog
Search: type, hit enter
Du kan læse om fartkampagnen Speedbandit her
Speedbandit
Go to comments
Leave a comment (1)
Tilbage i 2007 iværksatte Rådet for Større Færdselssikkerhed en kampagne, hvor målet var at få unge bilister til at sænke farten. – Kampagnen bestod i at unge og flotte piger stod næsten uden tøj på, og viste vejskilte med maks fart på.
Der blev også lagt en video på internettet, hvor det er et fiktivt nyhedsindslag. = Viral marketing.
Se videoen her:
Share
More info
RFSF
Det gav bl.a. også omtale i Top Gear som du kan se her:
Top Gear denmark speed sign
Share
More info
RFSF
Derudover anbefaler vi selvfølgelig at kigge forbi Rådet for Sikker Trafik, hvor deres kampagner pt. er en del mere alvorlige. – Du har sikkert set cyklisten som bliver kørt ned af lastbilen?
Leave a comment ?
1 Comments.
frisør 06/11/2011 at 14:15
Reply
Lol lidt for sjov reklame. Flere af dem tak lol
Leave a Comment
NAME
EMAIL
Website URL
NOTE - You can use these HTML tags and attributes:
<a href="" title=""> <abbr title=""> <acronym title=""> <b> <blockquote cite=""> <cite> <code> <del datetime=""> <i> <q cite=""> <strike>
RSS Feed
Søg
Search: type, hit enter
SEARCH
Nyeste indlæg
Telefonnumre og ip telefoni
Oplever du også at have depressioner
Fordele ved bredbånd og mobilt bredbånd
Römer KidFix er en sikker autostol til børn!
Der er forskellige rundrejser i Australien
Er du vild med iPhone, så kender jeg et godt firma til dig.
Jeg fandt en blog om Egebæk Byg
Kommentar
frisør on Speedbandit
Vores kategorier
Andre kategorier
Årstider
Båd
Bil
Diverse
Egebæk Byg
Erhverv
Ferie
Hus
Internet
IT
Kostumer
Overnatning
Rejser
Service
Sikkerhed
TV
Gode steder
Billig iPhone 5
FDM autohjælp
Google optimering
Søgeoptimering
Videoproduktion – FÅ lavet en firmavideo

xl

Tools that allow for some form of tracing reveal that both sites have existed for 9 years with continuous updates. The Wayback Machine regularly detects changes and updates while storing screenshots. When finding an archived screenshot, the links may not work, the digital infrastructure in the page is lost, yet we have access to whether pages have activity, and momentary glimpses into what it looks like at a specific time.

There are tools for accessing more information about the owner of the domain. Yet most visitors do not know this, or, if they do, they do not spend time on looking up sites. There are several pages featuring web interfaces, but the protocol used is the same. As of April 2015, a WHOIS query revealed that speedbandits.dk is registered and paid for, until 2015-09-30, while speedbandit.dk is now listed as available.



xli

The screenshot shows the campaign as it is presented to the seeders. It was taken a week after the campaign ended. There is a short time span in which seeders will receive funds per view for posting. After this it expires. It can still be posted, but it is no longer as interesting for seeders who publisher to make money from it.

	By: 212 Sexy				
	Danish Holiday Baby - Sweet Danish mom uses youtube.com to find August`s father By: ...	10th Sep 2009	Expired	(Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired) (Expired)	Posted, No more funds
	Pièces - Allégorie de la récupération d`énergie au freinage : Technologie efficiente avancée d`Audi. Les pièces	15th Sep 2009	Expired	(Expired)	No more funds

xlii

Timeline from Overskrift.dk.

Thursday September 10th, 2009

23:04 I (Stephan Bøgh-Andersen the creator of the timeline provided) discover the video and tweets: "A kind of net dating - on the wrong side of date" [followed by a link to the video]
The video is sent via GoViral, who has specialized in launching viral campaigns
I too post the video on Facebook under the headline "for real?"

Friday September 11th, 2009

Twitter. The first uses of #karen29 headline-markings starts appearing in Twitter posts.
22:32: Lively: discussions on Baby.dk
22:28 EB.dk: Seeks her child's father

Saturday September 12th, 2009

On the frontpage of the paper version of E.B
11:48 Jp.dk: "where is my sons father?"
12:53 Blog. Inspirationsministeriet: New viral turns Denmark upside down
13:21 Facebook: Henrik Føhns discussions regarding the video.
13:40 Blog, Mindjumpers: Danish mother seeking (The Father's Story) makes ironic video-reply as "the father" of the baby
14:02: Twitter @MortenSax reveals that it is for VisitDenmark
14:59 Blog Nodes: Karen / KarenDK26 – Who is behind the YouTube movie
15:49 Virkeligheden.dk: Why "Danish mother seeking" by KarenDK26 is fiction!
17: jp.dk: young woman seeks father of child" a media stunt?
17:22 Sydsvenskan.se: Completely wrong to use social media, featuring interview with Jonas Klit from Mindjumpers
21:52 EB.dk: Deep felt search – or just a stunt?

Sunday September 13th, 2009

10:07 JP.dk: Revealed: youtube-mother is actress
10:25 Virkeligheden.dk: 6 reasons why "Danish mother seeking" by "KarenDK26? went viral!
10:35 Blog. Podii.dk: Danish Mother Seeking Karen26 Featuring another "video reply"
11:05 Blog, Nodes: Karen26 / KarenDK26 now revealed – Featuring a picture of Ditte Arnth and a link to her actor- profile and /CV
11:25 Twitter 4nd3rs: Madness threatens – Who's first on meta-analysis of the analysis of #Karen26?

11:46 Hovedetpaabloggen: is it acceptable to use sincerity as a short cut to attention?
13:00 Aftonbladet.se: the movie is a bluff
14:31 Blog, Emme: Danish mother seeks father – Danish (new) media calls for ethics. Dorte Toft retweets: Is that supposed to be unethical?
17:42: Pol.dk: Dane tricked the whole world with fake son
19:00 Tv2 breaks the story that it is VisitDenmark who is behind the viral campaign video as the top story of the evening, featuring Peter Helstrup from the advertising company Grey and Dorte Kiilerich
TV2 Larger debate on the internet: Is a lie the way forward for VisitDenmark?
19:04 JP.dk: Tax money behind scam on YouTube
19:07 Berlingske: She scammed the whole world
19:16 EB.dk: Tax money behind scam on YouTube
19:22 Pol.dk: WRITE what you think of VisitDenmarks YouTube-ad?
Blog. AdLand. (Sweedish blog in English): "Karen" the Danish mother seeking is actually Ditte Arnth
19:42 Wikipedia page on VisitDenmark gets updated for the first time in 9 month. An English page for VisitDenmark is made on Wikipedia as well.
22:30 DR2 TV. Dorte Kiilerich in debate with Poul Madsen from Ekstra Bladet
22:51: Pol.dk: Researcher calls scam video tasteless

Monday September 14th, 2009

01:44 Blog, Patrick Damsted: VisitDenmark Brings Denmark into a Grey zone
08:28 Blog, Emme: "But we are not wearing any clothes!" (or: 10 things about the viral campaign from VisitDenmark)
09:09 Berlingske.dk: Furious over scam-ad and This is what the world writes about the scam-video
10:15 Mashable (British 'social media' blog): Danish Woman's One Night Stand Video Is a Government Hoax
10:28 Pol.dk: :Scam video on YouTube divides the politicians
10.29 DR.dk Angry over ad featuring lonely mother
10.41: The Garden of Epicurus: The lies of visitdenmark.dk
11.01 Medieblogger: Does VisitDenmark's flop mean that that finally we can get rid of viral movies?
VisitDenmark on their own homepage: Over one million have watched viral movie on YouTube
VisitDenmark removes the video from YouTube: VisitDenmark apologies movie on YouTube
Berlingske: Minister of business Lene Espersen: It is a good thing that the Scam movie is removed
Australian news: Danish woman's one-night stand 'a hoax' gets reddit'et with a huge amount of user, comments (via @mygdal)
13:09 PoetsAndPlumbers: What do you think of VisitDenmark, "Danish Mother Seeking"?
13:56 JP.dk Darth Vader, I am your father
14:26 Børsen: VisitDenmark lost faith: Video removed from Youtube mistede modet: video fjernet fra YouTube via BureauBiz, Finn Graversen
Another Danish Mother Seeking parody: Brooklyn Father Seeking via Podii
The Denver Egotist: Danes are lame
16:05 Blog. Trine-Maria Kristensen: 5 reasons why VisitDenmark and Grey's campaign did not work!
17:17 Avisen.dk: VisitDenmark-reklame kan ryge i retten
Blog. Wemind: Problemet med Karen26
21:27: Blog. Social Marketing "rebel" Henriette Weber: A story in failing on social media: VisitDenmark and "Karen26"
21:29 Blog: Jonas Smith: Free sex and new media
21:32 Podcast. Communikation cast, Peter Andreas regarding the viral Campaign
Information.dk: Was Karen and August terrible or genius marketing?

Tuesday September 15th, 2009

07.45 Go' morgen Danmark featuring. Katrine Emme Thielke (@Emme) on VisitDenmarks viral video interview by Anders Breinholt (announced by @tv2dk)
09:51 MetroXpress: Older people do not understand 'Karen'

Markedsføring: VisitDenmark past the chance
17.33 Journalisten.dk: Awesom equality in Denmark
21:25 Blog. Marketear: #Karen26 – the birth or breakdown?
21:59 Blog. Blogsbjerg: Dishonest ad! How rude!
Adland: Not quite done with #Karen26 – this is what you did wrong Grey and GoViral
New York Times: Danish Video Stirs Outrage
Huffington Post: Denmark; Tourism Ad Pulled Over Promiscuity Charges
Wednesday September 16th, 2009
Kommunikationsforum, Asger Liebst: What your mother did not tell you about unsafe viral videos
BBC: Denmark pulls 'promiscuous' video
13.10 Blog. Social Hallucinations by Karim Stoumann: Why "Danish Mother Seeking" campaign failed
16.24 Blog. Stance: Karen26: cheap Danish girls is unethical marketing
TV. Fox News in USA picks up the case: Desperately Seeking Daddy (via @marks)
Torsdag d. 17 september 2009
YouTube. Karen25 subjected to Der Untergang meme with Hitler:
Fredag d. 18. september 2009
21:00 TV. Ditte Arnth, who plays Karen, interviewed by Anders Lund Madsen in "Det Nye Talkshow"

xliii

Video by the Australian actress featured in the ad The Man in the Jacket

Hey again you guys. It's me again.

Well, I guess you all know why I am posting this video – I am coming clean [pause]

Yes, I am an actress. Yes, I was employed by WITCHERYMAN, and yes, I even managed to get my face on national TV. [Smiling]

So why did I do it? [pause]

Because to be honest, I am a hopeless romantic! [pause]

And, like a lot of you guys, I LOVE a good love story. [pause]

The media are calling in a modern-day Cinderella story and you know what? They are right, that is exactly what we are trying to do [smiling] [pause]

Well while we are on the truth, let me give you guys the whole deal: [pause]

This isn't my house – we rented it. [pause]

These aren't my clothes; I was dressed by a stylist. [pause]

This IS a WITCHERYMAN jacked though. [pause]

It's a size 42 and it will be prized from around 369,95 [pause]

I DID make my own website, with crashed because so many of you wanted to see it. [pause]

– crazy [pause]

So, to everyone who came along for the ride, Thank you! Your emails messages and support has been amazing. [pause]

Ohh and by the way. My real name is Lilly.

[Sends a kiss]

xliv

Video from VisitLyngby

[Man, voice over]

We all know the story of Karen. A young strong Danish woman who seeks the father of her child. [pause]

I LOVE LYNGBY thinks that Karen searches for much more than that. [pause]

[Woman, appearing on the screen]

Hello Karen, we were thrilled to watch your video [pause]

You say you are looking the Augusts father, but what you are really searching for Karen, is a place to live. [pause]

For you are a strong woman who does not even need a man [pause]

We would like to welcome you in Lyngby [Woman looks up and smiles at the camera. pause]

If you want to know more about Lyngby just visit our website ILOVELYNGBY.com

[Woman pointing to her left to indicate where the link is, next to the video. The video continues with stuff that newcomer gets for free, and more advertising on events and opportunities for people living in Lyngby]

xlv

Dorthe Kiilerich and Poul Madsen are asked to kick off the debate by shortly stating "why this is or is not a successful campaign."

Dorthe Kiilerich: This is an effective form of global marketing. And the purpose was to increase awareness of Denmark as a travel destination globally [pause]

No other Danish company has managed to brand their product so effectively globally and fast before.

Poul Madsen: There is nothing to be proud of. My mother taught me not to lie. And I think the most absurd thing in this, is that VisitDenmark is trying to sell Denmark on a lie around the world.

Dorthe Kiilerich: The story we tell, we tell on a modern media. A media that is different from your media -the serious news press. It is a media used to be in dialogue with the world outside. This media has brought both true and false stories many many times before.

*Poul Madsen: But you use **my** media! A media known to be trusted. A media that readers should be able to trust!!![pause]*

You portray Denmark as a place where people can come, make babies, and leave without knowing about them.

Dorthe Kiilerich: The people who enter YouTube know what kind of media they are dealing with. They are used to operate in this media, that is quite different from a traditional newspaper.

*Poul Madsen: you **want** us to believe the story.*

Dorthe Kiilerich: No, we want to tell a story. YOU re-tell is as a true story.

Poul Madsen: And the story is: Denmark is a country with blond girls. Come and visit, it is quite easy to have sex with Danish girls?

*Dorthe Kiilerich: That is **your** perspective on women. The purpose is different […]*

Karen is a modern grown-up woman, who took her own decisions in life. What she says with dignity is: I don't need anyone's help, but if possible, I would like to get in touch with my child's father. [pause]

I live in a society, luckily coincidently, where there is space and tolerance.

Reporter to Poul Madsen: Isn't the problem that you believed it. You did not catch the story?

Poul Madsen: No, I believed it to be true!

Reporter to Poul Madsen: Then should you not have researched better?

Poul Madsen: NO […Changes subject to…]

Reporter interrupts: Is it not you who contribute to legitimize the story. When it was on YouTube people believed it to be a story?

*Poul Madsen: Why did **you** [pointing At Dorthe Kiilerich] not react when almost all Danish media brought the story? You didn't because it is as a cynical speculation*

*Reporter interrupts and asks Dorthe Kiilerich: Why **did** you not react yesterday when it was all over the news?*

Dorthe Kiilerich: Naturally not, because, for us, it is a matter of allowing as many as possible to have an opportunity to discuss this story on YouTube. The moment people know who is behind it, it's a different kind of commercial approach. [pause]

The longer the story can live as a true/false on YouTube the better. [pause]

The rest of the world still talks about the global story. It is the media in Denmark with a true vs false perspective. a news perspective interprets the story.

[The interview stops shortly after this comment.]

xlvi


YouTube
Search
Karen from Denmark is looking for you on Youtube.
The 26 year old blonde we met in Copenhagen.
0:30 / 3:49
Hitlers response to KarenDK26.mp4
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Dina Pigen - 2 / 59

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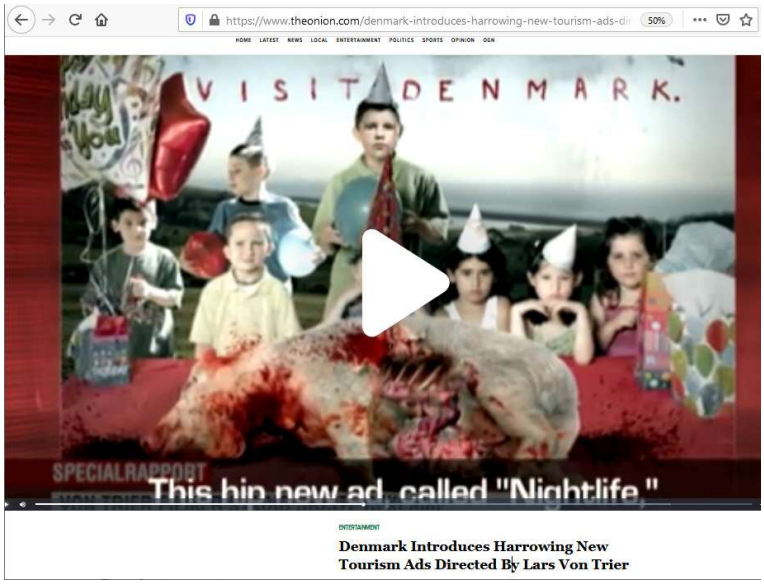
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