

WHAT MAKES A NON-PROFESSIONAL VIDEO GO VIRAL: A CASE STUDY OF  
“I’M FARMING AND I GROW IT”

by

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## **Abstract**

In 2013, creating a 57-second video can lead to more than \$150,000 in profit for the creator and the creator can be anyone. This money-making opportunity comes from a recent popular trend known as a “viral video,” defined as a phenomenon of a video becoming highly popular through rapid, user-led distribution via the internet. However, research has not determined a clear model for creating a non-professional viral video. Interviews and YouTube analytics revealed how the video “I’m Farming and I Grow It,” a non-professional video created by three Kansas boys, was spread. Using the theories Uses and Gratifications and Two-Step Flow, this case study then analyzed the comments posted on the viral video and a content analysis of the comments identified the key factors mentioned by users, which contributed to the videos’ millions of views. The results conclude the key components for making a non-professional video go viral are “opinion leaders” spreading the message and video content that elicits positive feelings such as joy, humor, or praise. This study also provides a model to help a non-professional video go viral based on previous research and this case study.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 2011, YouTube had more than 1 trillion views, which is about 140 views for every person on Earth (YouTube, 2013). Since its inception in 2006, this video viewing and uploading site has grown enormously and is changing the content distribution landscape as well as popular culture (Cheng, et. al, 2007).

This new medium has created a space where unknown individuals can now get their 15 minutes of fame. In some cases, the 15 minutes of fame that comes from a video's exposure can lead to a lifetime of fame. This is all thanks to "viral video," defined as a phenomenon of a video becoming highly popular through rapid, user-led distribution via the internet (Burgess, 2008).

The popularity of video, especially user-generated content, has not gone unnoticed. In 2006, *Time* magazine named "You" its Person of the Year for "seizing the reigns of global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game" (Jenkins, 2007).

Viral videos create a world of opportunity for a variety of people: marketers, celebrities and even the "average Joe." Going viral can lead to a career (Sommerford, 2011) and can earn people profit simply by sitting on their couches (Ivry, 2011). Professional music videos are the top-viewed videos on YouTube, and promoting music on the site has given artists record-breaking sales numbers (Haenlin & Kaplan, 2012). The video site has even created musical artists. Justin Bieber may be a household name now, but at one time he was just a 16-year-old from Canada posting YouTube videos (Forbes, 2011).

It is clear that the end results are worth creating a viral video. Viral marketing is cheap, yet reaches the same level of awareness as a television advertisement, sometimes even more (Haenlin & Kaplan, 2011). However, what goes into creating a viral video is what researchers

are still trying to distinguish. Several studies have analyzed the factors that may lead to going viral. These factors include online viewership, blog discussion, mainstream media exposure and emotional arousal. However, only one of these studies examines an individual video that has become a YouTube sensation (Wallsten, 2008). Likewise, very few researchers have examined the comments posted by YouTube viewers to determine what factors make the video appealing.

This study will fill these gaps by analyzing the development and content of comments made on the “I’m Farming and I Grow It” video, a non-professional video that was created by three Kansas youth about farming (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48H7zOQrX3U>). As of April 2013, this video received more than 8 million views and was featured in several blogs and publications, eventually landing the Kansas farmers in New York to be interviewed on *Fox and Friends*. By identifying these factors, as well as the young men’s intentions when creating and posting the video, this research will develop a model for creating a non-professional viral video.

Such a model outlining the key components to a successful non-professional viral video can help many industries. Universities are only beginning to explore how to deploy new media strategies to expand visibility of their research and scholarship (Jenkins, 2007). Having a model will give universities a valuable tool to gain recognition and, hopefully, boost enrollment. At the same time, universities will be able to teach journalism, public relations and marketing students the key to creating a non-professional viral video, thus giving the students a leg up when searching for jobs post-graduation. Industry practitioners are interested in the potential use of various media and understanding which media may be more highly sought due to the uses and gratifications obtained. Not only can practitioners use this model for YouTube videos, but it will give them insight into what gratifications are received from online video in general.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### *Theoretical Framework*

The Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that users actively choose media to fulfill their needs (Blumler, Guerevity & Katz, 1974). Uses and gratifications assumes the audience has a reason for choosing a particular type of media and users are often influenced by past media gratifications (Bondad-Brown, Rice & Pearce, 2012). While it may be assumed that the uses and gratifications obtained from television are the same as those from online video, previous research proves otherwise. In American culture, a wide variety of media exist and a multitude of gratifications can be gained; however, with certain media come unique gratifications. Below is an outline of how uses and gratifications theory has been used to study “new media” and how the theory is beneficial to this study.

When personal computers were first introduced into homes in 1995, Kraut and his colleagues (1999) provided participants with computers and conducted surveys and interviews to determine the uses and gratifications gained from the device. At this time, participants strongly preferred email rather than surfing the web, and accessed it before the web 75 percent of the time (Kraut, et. al, 1999). Participants tended to use the internet more often during the week when other family members were using the internet, leading the authors to conclude that the main gratification received from computers and the internet was interpersonal communication (Kraut, et. al, 1999).

When the internet was still considered a “new medium,” Weber (1997) interviewed several teens about how they used the internet; most participants said they hopped around several different sites. Results from Tewksbury & Althaus (2000) also support the active audience theory, with participants identifying a variety of gratifications from internet usage. These results



show the web use appears to be purposive and goal oriented where users seek out different types of sites for different gratifications (Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000).

Much like the multiple channels of a cable television system, the World Wide Web has a variety of websites users may choose from. Ferguson & Perse (2000) determined there are several similar gratifications gained from the two media; however, there are also key differences. Survey participants reported entertainment and passing time as gratifications from both television and the internet (Ferguson & Perse, 2000). In contrast, participants reported using television to obtain information while they used the web for relaxation and social information (Ferguson & Perse, 2000). Like television, the web is seen as a source of diversion, but it may not be a medium to leave on in the background to “have someone else in the house” (Ferguson & Perse, 2000).

As the popularity of the internet grew, so did the advancements in technology, which led to online video, considered another “new media.” Although similar to traditional television, researchers have determined the uses and gratifications for online video vary from the traditional form. More recent research conflicts with the findings of Ferguson & Perse (2000), which stated that television is used for information and the web is used for entertainment. A study by Hagerty (2008) distinguishes between the different benefits participants gain from traditional television versus YouTube, finding that television is used for entertainment and escape, while YouTube is used more for information and companionship. But four years later, Bondad-Brown, Rice & Pearce (2012) found that online video was used more for information than entertainment. This conflicting research could be a result of the increased sophistication of internet usage.

While the research may be mixed on which media best satisfy certain gratifications, most studies conclude there are two main motivations for using media: to gain information and for

entertainment. Sometimes these two motivations go together. A study of a gaming website found that participants used the site as a source of information as well as for entertainment (Gummerus & Lijander, 2012). Earlier, Shao (2009) studied user-generated media and also found that participants used the content for information, entertainment and mood management.

Often times though, users are seeking one or the other. More studies have shown the connection between the internet and the consumption of information. The internet has become a primary source of information during election periods; 88 percent of all voters went online for political information during the 2008 presidential election and nearly one billion clips of political content were viewed (Vernallis, 2011). The web has also become the first stop for many Americans seeking medical information with fifty-million Americans obtaining health-related information from the internet monthly (Sood et. al, 2011). A website called CaringBridge provides personal web pages for those experiencing health issues and participants using the site reported that providing information to others was their primary motivation for using the site (Anderson, 2011).

While entertainment and information-seeking have been determined to be two overall motivations for all media, few researchers have been able to agree on specific motivations for each particular type of media. This study will apply the uses and gratifications theory to online video to determine the specific motivations that led users to pass along a particular video, helping to make it “go viral.”

### ***User-Generated Content***

As technology continues to advance, so do the different types of media. With the growth of the World Wide Web has come the growth of online video, which has led to the advent of user-generated content (Cha, et. al, 2007). User-generated content (UGC) is defined by *PC*

*Magazine* as “any form of content that was created by consumers or end-users of an online system or service and is publicly available to other consumers” (UGC, 2013). This can be video, blogs, discussion forum posts, digital images and audio files. UGC has reshaped the online video market enormously (Cha, et. al, 2007). More than half of all video content consumed online in the United States is UGC, which is about 44 billion video streams (Peter & Ksiazek, 2011).

One of the first forms of UGC was vlogging, which is a form of blogging using video (Gao, et. al, 2010). Shortly after the rise of the internet in 1997, blogging became popular as a way for users to tell about their lives. These written postings expanded to vlogging, where the creators film themselves, usually in their bedroom, talking about their lives. Tolson (2010) describes vlogs as more authentic and interactive than traditional forms of media, and this form of expression has surged to unprecedented levels. The main site for these vlogs is YouTube (Tolson, 2010).

### ***YouTube***

YouTube is a video sharing site that has grown enormously since its inception in 2006 and arguably has changed the content distribution landscape as well as created its own type of popular culture (Cheng, et. al, 2007). Today, it is the fourth most visited website in the world with approximately 450 million monthly visitors (YouTube, 2013). The site began as a place for amateurs to create video and share it with each other (Kim, 2012), but it is not the same as “television.” Rather its videos are less constraining (Tolson, 2010).

While YouTube may have started as an outlet for teenagers, it has expanded its viewing audience with seven out of 10 adult internet users reportedly watching streaming online video (Walters & Jones, 2011). It is also available in 53 countries and in 61 different languages (YouTube, 2013). While research has shown that not everyone considers themselves a part of the

YouTube community, 96 percent of those participants who say they do not have a sense of belonging still reported talking about videos watched on YouTube (Milliken, et. al, 2008).

The site provides a variety of content, with categories ranging from music to sports to news (YouTube, 2013). Older research has even reported the site has been used for terrorist messages (Naim, 2007) and a place to post birthing videos (Longhurst, 2009). Not only is it a place to post videos that might not belong on television, YouTube also brings worldwide attention to videos that gained little response when aired on television (Naim, 2007). Known as the “YouTube Effect,” this phenomenon consists of videos produced by individuals acting on their own that are rapidly disseminated worldwide (Naim, 2007). This rapid dissemination is even leading to the use of UGC by the mainstream media because the thousands of professional journalists will never be as omnipresent as the millions of people carrying phones that record video (Naim, 2007).

However, not everyone who posts videos wants a lot of views; sometimes, the video creator simply seeks the social interaction (Lange, 2007). YouTube provides that function as a media circuit, which is defined as the use of media by a social group to stay connected (Lange, 2007). The site has created its own community, which consists of more than users just watching videos. Users can subscribe to the site and create their own profile pages. Linking profiles is the primary way of supporting the social group, while posting comments allows users to connect by expressing their feelings or affinity for a video or video maker (Lange, 2007). Research shows that most users will respond to a comment posted on their video, perhaps showing an additional social interaction associated with this medium (Lange, 2007).

The anonymity of posting comments also opens the door for negativity; however, there does not appear to be much difference in the number of hateful comments posted on online

videos versus text-based media (Lange, 2007). Youth attitudes about such hateful comments are complex and many expect it to come with the territory of posting content online (Lange, 2007). Despite the potential for negativity, online comments have the potential to be viewed favorably as a popular means of communication (Santana, 2011). A study of YouTube comments throughout the site found the comments to be mildly positive (Thelwall, Sud & Vis, 2012). The same study also found that videos in the categories news, politics, science and religion received the highest number of comments, whereas videos in the most-viewed categories of music and comedy had the least number of comments (Thelwall, Sud & Vis, 2012). So far, research has not definitively analyzed the motivation for why users post comments or the overarching content of these comments. Despite that, research does show that these comments are a unique form of social interaction.

### ***Viral Videos***

One video that has millions of comments as well as nearly 1.4 billion views is “Gangnam Style,” a music video by PSY that features a unique dance move that looks similar to a rider galloping on an invisible horse (YouTube, 2013). This dance move, along with the catchy tune, has led to hundreds of parody videos and is the most-watched viral video on YouTube to date.

This video is one of many that have “gone viral,” a phenomenon YouTube has created. Soon after its inauguration, YouTube videos quickly became popular, receiving millions of hits. One of the earliest viral sensations was an artist who went by the alias Tay Zonday. He became a well-known name in 2007 once his video hit 12 million views (Ivry, 2007). Zonday said he did not put much thought into posting the video in which he sings an original song titled “Chocolate Rain” in his home, but that video soon landed him fame and a spot in an advertisement for Cherry Dr. Pepper (Ivry, 2007).

Early pioneers of YouTube and viral videos often gained millions of views just by “pure luck.” That is how Judson Laipply, the creator of “Evolution of Dance,” describes his rise in viewership (Angwin, 2009). In April of 2006, Laipply uploaded his six-minute video featuring himself recreating all the popular dance moves throughout history. He said links to the video were passed through email and next thing he knew, the video had reached 100 million views (Angwin, 2009).

Shortly after, YouTube users realized the power of this site and used it to enhance their music and popularity. Celebrities turned to YouTube to create buzz and endorse their products. Singer Britney Spears, for instance, leaked snippets of a new music video on YouTube to create hype, and the leaks resulted in the best sales week for a digital song in Spears’ history (Haenlin & Kaplan, 2012). Many others have also reaped the benefits of having a viral video. Two Croatian cellists, for example, launched a music career after becoming a YouTube sensation, and one string musician found it easier to make a living through YouTube than with a record label (Sommerford, 2011). A YouTube video transformed Justin Bieber from a 16-year-old singing in his home in a small-town in Canada to a household name (Forbes, 2011). Bieber’s manager Scooter Braun discovered the boy’s video online and saw his potential, then used YouTube to market his talents since kids were spending more time on the internet than using television or radio (Forbes, 2011). By making basic videos using a flip camera and minimal editing, Bieber went from having a video with 70 million views to having the second most-viewed video on YouTube with more than 840 million views (YouTube, 2013).

YouTube stardom took Bieber from an average teenager to a teenager now worth about \$110 million (S. Sammy, 2012). Bieber is an example that it is possible for UGC to be more than a pastime and also be a way of boosting income. One way to make money is through YouTube

advertisements. The creators of YouTube have noticed the popularity of their videos and place advertisements on some of those with higher views (Miller, 2011). This creates a partnership where both the creator and the advertiser receive a portion of the profits earned from the number of times viewers click on the video (Miller, 2011).

This profit can be substantial, especially for users who merely posted videos of their children to share with relatives. For example, the most viewed non-professional YouTube video is called “Charlie Bit Me.” As of April 2013, this video is ranked the sixth most-viewed YouTube video, following five professionally made music videos, which are “Gangnam Style” by PSY, “Baby” by Justin Bieber featuring Ludacris, “On the Floor” by Jennifer Lopez featuring Pit Bull, “Love the Way You Lie” by Eminem featuring Rihanna and “Party Rock Anthem” by LMFAO featuring Lauren Bennett and Goonrock (YouTube, 2013).

“Charlie Bit Me” features two boys from the United Kingdom. In the video, the older boy puts his finger in his younger brother’s mouth and his brother bites his finger. The boy finds the bite so amusing that he puts his finger in his little brother’s mouth again, only this time the brother chomps down harder and the older brother screams out “Charlie Bit Me.” From the time the video was posted in 2007 until mid-2011, the video was viewed almost 400 million times and the family had earned \$150,000.. The boys’ father, Howard Davies-Carr, said he posted the video because he wanted to get a snapshot of his boys and share it online with family and friends abroad. He never expected the fame or money (Sibary, 2011). Another father who posted a video on YouTube of his 7-year-old son also had no intention of making money; he just wanted to show the hilarious comments coming from the boy still on anesthesia after a trip to the dentist. Instead, he has now earned more than \$100,000 from the time the video was posted in 2009 up through 2011 (Miller, 2011).

### ***Opinion Leaders***

With so much money and fame at stake, marketers and average YouTube creators have been searching for that special quality that makes a video go viral (Cashmore, 2009). Some research suggests that it may be more about the person endorsing the content than the actual content itself. According to the Two-Step Flow Theory developed by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz, messages do not directly flow from the mass media to the audience; rather, mass media first reaches an “opinion leader” who then passes along the information. Opinion leaders give details and information to less active persons in the group and, therefore, influence the group’s behavior, attitudes and beliefs. (David, D. & Baran, S., 2011).

Several studies posit that opinion leaders may play a key role in choosing what video become viral. For example, Naim (2007) cites an incidence of a shooting in China that was aired on mainstream media. This tragedy gained little attention through mainstream media coverage, however, a user-generated video of the incident posted on YouTube led to worldwide attention. An incident gaining attention in this way is an example of the “YouTube Effect,” a phenomenon whereby videos produced by individuals acting on their own are rapidly disseminated around the world (Naim, 2007).

Wallsten (2008) suggests the popularity of a video is not only about the number of people who watch online, but also about the opinion leaders who act as catalysts to drive additional viewing. He argues that blog discussion plays a crucial role in guiding viewers to the video; however, he adds bloggers may be attracted to the video based on the number of views rather than their interest in the content (Wallsten, 2008). Another research study concluded it is not blogs that account for successfully spreading a video, but rather email and word of mouth



(Bondad-Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012). Only 6 percent of the participants in this study indicated they chose online video based on blog discussions; more than 60 percent said links passed through email accounted for their viewing and 20 percent attributed their viewing choices to face-to-face interactions (Bondad-Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012).

Godes & Mayzlin (2004) suggest word-of-mouth has more potential impact than any other communication channel. Word-of-mouth (WOM) is defined as sharing information about products, companies, etc. between a consumer and others and is up to seven times more effective at reaching a larger audience than a newspaper advertisement (Haenlin & Kaplan, 2011). Word-of-mouth referrals have a strong long-lasting impact on new customer acquisition. WOM's effect lasts three weeks versus traditional marketing, which has lasting effects for only three-to-seven days (Truson, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2008).

Thus, the “who” that is spreading the message and endorsing the video may also be a key component to a video going viral. In addition, source credibility seems to play a role in viral video dissemination. A study on the credibility of YouTube political videos found that source credibility is the highest-ranked appeal among users (English, Sweetser & Ancu, 2011). Another study found that females are more influenced by expert opinions, whereas males are more likely to share or view content based on “fraternal” suggestions (Chyan, Yi-Chun & Suyanti, 2010). Results from a study of email by De Bruyn & Lilien in 2004 show that “tie strength”--how well a subject knows the sender--influences the spread of the message. Referrals from sources with similar tastes were more likely to generate interest and lead to the subject opening the email (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2004). In contrast, a more recent study by Bondad-Brown, Rice & Pearce (2012) found that the participants' relationship to the recommender had no influence on their decision to view a video; they gave more weight to the source and channel of the online video.

### ***Viral Components***

While the source of the referral may be of importance, what might be a bigger factor is the video's content. An early study of the internet showed that teenagers primarily used the medium to visit their favorite bands' websites (Weber, 1997). One decade later, Cheng, Liu & Dale (2007) found the most popular category of videos on YouTube to be music, followed by entertainment and comedy. In 2012, the top five most-viewed videos on YouTube were all professional music videos while 72 of the top 100 clips were music videos posted by major labels (Kim, 2012).

Researchers also agree that emotion plays a large role in viral success, no matter what the medium. Phelps et. al (2004) found that participants were more likely to forward an email that contained a joke, while the top four out of six reasons given for communicating through pass-along-emails was "enjoyment" or "entertainment" (Phelps, et. al, 2004). A study of *New York Times* articles shared by readers determined that positive and negative emotions which incite arousal will lead to sharing (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Thus, emotions like joy and anger result in users sharing stories that elicit those feelings. Sadness, an emotion that depresses individuals rather than exciting them, did not lead users to share that story (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Another study found similar results. Lin et. al (2006) concluded that emotions can trigger participants to forward email. However, only emails emoting positive feelings led to this reaction.

Researchers have also studied emotions used in viral advertising campaigns. Dobeles, et. al (2007) claim that viral marketing campaigns must build upon emotion. A good example is a viral marketing campaign created by Honda in 2003 in the United Kingdom called the "Honda

Cog.” The ad showed all the parts used to assemble a Honda hitting each other in a domino-like fashion, eventually revealing the whole car. This ad led to record-breaking sales because of its aspects of fun and wonder (Dobele, et. al, 2005). Two years later the same researchers interviewed participants about nine successful viral campaigns and found that surprise was the dominant emotion listed by every participant about each campaign (Dobele, et. a, 2007). Another study of television advertisements previewed before airing determined that advertisements that scored high in the categories of enjoyment and involvement had a significant positive correlation to the views per week (Southgate, 2010).

Finally, Burgess (2008) argues that “participation” is the key to the popularity of YouTube and its videos’ success. Watching media is active, not passive, and therefore, the audience wants to be involved (Lange, 2007). This desire is shown in video-thread responses (Adami, 2009). A video thread begins when a creator posts a video and asks for users to respond with a video of their own. One example is “Where do You Tube,” a video inviting other users to give their geographic location; the video thread received more than 700 responses (Adami, 2007).

Lange’s (2007) study of social interaction on YouTube found that the quality of the video is not even that important to users, because the site is more about the users’ interaction. A study by Hustead (2012) supports Lange’s research and found that users reported passing along videos for the social interaction, especially if these videos had popular culture references. This excitement about the ability to interact with other users is sparking a new trend on YouTube known as “memes” or “memetic videos”. A memetic video is a popular clip that lures extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, mash-up, etc. (Shifman, 2011). The most popular memetic videos involve a focus on ordinary people, flawed masculinity, humor,

simplicity, repetitiveness and whimsical content. Most also reference popular culture (Shifman, 2011).

One of the first well-known memetic videos was the “Bed Intruder,” a video which features an auto-tuned version of Antoine Dodson showing his outrage for a stranger who attempted to rape his sister (Carvin, 2010). This video led to more than 700 memes (Carvin, 2010). Another popular memetic video in the spring of 2013 was the “Harlem Shake.” In this video, the song “Harlem Shake” by Baauer plays in the background. The song starts with a 15-second intro then a bass drop; after the bass drop, the tempo picks up once again. During the first 15 seconds, an individual in a mask or costume dances in a room full of people who do not seem to notice the dancer. Then after the bass drop, the video cuts and comes back to a room full of people in various costumes, all dancing convulsively. The first video was posted on January 30, 2013, and as of February 13, 2013, more than 4,000 videos had been uploaded showing the creators with their own versions of the original posting (knowyourmeme, 2013). The phenomenon also helped the song featured in each video reach an all-time high on iTunes at #3 in overall sales in the U.S. (knowyourmeme, 2013).

The little research done on this topic shows that memes may spread differently than a traditional video. Black (2007) suggests that memes, truthful or not, spread through the public sphere the same way and uses the example of the saying “Don’t step on the crack or you’ll break your mother’s back” to illustrate his point. The statement is not truthful, yet it has been passed on for generations (Black, 2007). That saying has been passed through WOM and research suggests that memetic videos may have a similar transfer. According to Carter & Arroyo (2011), participants in their study typically discovered memes by way of sharing rather than searching.

Research regarding the spread of memes is lacking. It is also unclear why certain memes become much more popular than other memes that parody the same thing. This question is one of many regarding viral videos that have yet to be answered. While research is lacking on what leads to the spread of memes, there is also little research distinguishing key factors that lead to a video gaining millions of views. Cashmore (2009) points out that it is hard to identify exactly what makes a video go viral; however, some bloggers and researchers have attempted to create a model demonstrating the key features the creator should include when making a video.

Angwin (2009) attempted to create a recipe for going viral and highlighted three key factors: great content, building a fan base and search engine optimization. However, her model only scratched the surface of these key factors and did not define the vague terms such as “great content.” Angwin (2009) merely provided examples of videos with “great content,” instead of identifying the types of content that are ideal. In the section about building a fan base, Angwin (2009) illustrates an example of one video creator who has thousands of subscribers and who sends out an email to those subscribers every time he posts a new video. Her model includes useful tips to increase search engine optimization like having a clear video title, an accurate description and keywords; however, since other research concludes that most videos are shared, keywords are important but the method of sharing a video may have more relevance in achieving millions of views. While Angwin’s (2009) model may have some useful tips, it does not elaborate on these suggestions or validate them through analyzing previous research.

Blogger Heather Koehler (2012) wrote about the success of “I’m Farming and I Grow It.” She said that in her opinion, the main reasons this video went viral are because of the popular culture connection, the fun aspect, the production quality, the media mix and that fact that the boys are real people (Koehler, 2012). These all seem like possible factors that may be very

important in creating a viral video; however, her blog entry has not been substantiated by research.

This study will use previous research and Koehler's comments, as well as comments posted to the "I'm Farming and I Grow It" video, to create a model to guide a video to viral success. Previous researchers agree the two main motivations for consuming video are for information and for entertainment, but previous studies have not been able to conclude whether it is one or both of these motives that has made YouTube so popular. In addition, research is lacking in identifying what causes online videos to disseminate so rapidly, whether that is due to the content the of the video, the source of the recommendation or the blogs and mainstream media promoting the video. This study will consider all of these factors through a case study of a viral video which reached thousands of views within a couple of days of its posting. An analysis of the comments will give an unobtrusive view of the expressed reason viewers felt compelled to not only watch the video, but to leave a comment.

Thus, this study will help discern why some memes go viral, while others do not. The study's overall research question is "What factors enticed viewers to watch 'I'm Farming and I Grow It?'" Based on the assumptions of Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Two-Step Flow Theory, as well as the findings from previous research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1: Videos like "I'm Farming and I Grow It" go viral because they present relevant information in an entertaining way.*

*H2: For a video to go viral, it must pertain to popular culture, defined as items that are well known and generally accepted cultural patterns that are widespread within a population.*

*H3: An endorsement by a credible source or opinion leader will spark the amount of interest in a video and therefore increase the number of views.*

## Chapter 3 - Methods

### *Interviews*

Interviews are most appropriate for situations in which you want to ask open-ended questions that elicit a depth of information from relatively few people. The first step of this study was an interview of the “I’m Farming and I Grow It” creators. The three creators of “I’m Farming and I Grow It” are the Peterson brothers: Greg, 22, Nathan, 19, and Kendal, 16. The brothers are from Assaria, Kansas, and Greg and Nathan attend Kansas State University.

The purpose of the interview is to understand the motivations behind creating the video; how the young men spread the word about the video, if they did at all; and what they believed made this non-professional video go viral. Due to the overwhelming amount of media attention the Peterson brothers were receiving, the boys asked to be sent the interview questions via a Facebook message on their fan page instead of meeting in person.

Senator Pat Roberts was also interviewed. He posted a link on his Facebook page on June 26, 2012, one day after the Peterson brothers posted their video. His Facebook post read “Well it’s not Ray Price, but I think you will enjoy it. This one is making the rounds of those proud to live in Ag country today. Well done guys!” The Peterson brothers stated in a *Salina Journal* article shortly after the video went viral that they believed the reason their video gained so many views was because of Senator Roberts endorsement (Strand, 2012). The Two-Step Flow Theory would present Senator Roberts as an opinion leader who shared the message, thus creating an influx of video views.

The purpose of interviewing Senator Roberts was to determine how he found out about the video and why he decided to pass it along. Due to the Senator’s busy schedule, questions and

responses were sent through his communication director via email. Both sets of interview questions and responses can be found in Appendix A.

### ***Content Analysis***

Following the interviews, a content analysis was conducted of the more than 11,000 comments on the video. Content analysis is the study of recorded human communications and is a method of research that analyzes texts in search of themes or characteristics (Babbie, 2010). This content analysis identified themes within the comment's section, which may explain the various reasons users watched the video.

The appeal of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive. Comments can be analyzed as they were originally written. These comments were coded and recorded in this study verbatim, so improper spelling and grammar appears as written by the users. By studying the comments as they were posted on the page, the results will show the most accurate expression of that commenter.

The content analysis began by establishing inter-coder reliability. This ensures the coders agree upon both the unit being measured and the content characterization. The unit of analysis was the individual comments. A code book—which can be found in Appendix B-- was developed using factors deemed relevant based on previous research. The categories within the code book and explanations for the categories' individual factors can be found in the code book section below.



### ***Inter-Coder Reliability***

Inter-coder reliability was established to ensure coders agree upon both the unit being measured and the content characterization. The unit of analysis was the individual comments. In order to establish inter-coder reliability, the two coders analyzed the first 100 comments posted on the “I’m Elmo and I Know It” video. This video was chosen because it is a parody similar to the video in this case study. However, this video did not meet the same criteria as the farming video because, instead of having ordinary people as actors, it features a celebrity puppet. Also, the lyrics—posted in Appendix C—were not about agriculture. Because the “I’m Farming and I Grow It” code sheet was created to analyze an agriculturally related video, the coders decided to test their understanding of potential comments through coding another Peterson brothers’ video, “Farmer Style.” This video is also a parody of a popular song, “Gangnam Style.” The lyrics for “Farmer Style”—posted in Appendix D—also address a topic similar to the video being studied. Thus, this video is a much better fit for testing the coding sheet.

Following the initial attempt at establishing coder reliability, the coders decided to adjust the code book and further define each category. Once these adjustments were made, the coders obtained reliability for each category. The reliability scores were 0.91 for “emotional reaction,” 0.96 for “entertainment,” 0.98 for “main actor in video,” 0.99 for “relationship to sender,” 1.0 for “source of shared content,” 1.0 for “video quality,” 0.99 for “participation” and 0.90 for “other.” The final code sheet can be found in Appendix E.

### ***Code Book***

The first category coded was emotional reaction, since several studies named this as the chief reason for sharing content. The factors in this category are joy, anger, disappointment, surprise, funny and compliments. Since Phelps et. al (2004) and Berger & Milkman (2012)

found that positive and negative emotions can trigger participants to share the content that elicited that emotion, the two factors “joy” and “anger” were chosen for coding. Words such as “love” were coded as joy, as well as comments that included a large number of exclamation points or emoticons. “Disappointment” was added to the code because some comments might not necessarily be angry responses, but may still have a negative connotation. The emotion of “surprise” was chosen as a factor because Dobele et. al (2007) found this to be a key element in viral success. “Surprise” was defined as terms like OMG, meaning “oh my gosh,” or WTF, slang used to mean “what the f\*\*k?” Also, several studies found “humor” to be an important factor, so the “funny/humor” category was included. Coders chose this category when a comment involved laughing, such as “haha” or the user saying “This is so funny.” The coders browsed some of the recent comments on the video “I’m Elmo and I Know It,” a similar parody video, and found congratulatory comments such as “Great job” so The “complimentary” factor was added based on this observation.

As stated earlier, the two main gratifications achieved from viewing video are “information” and “entertainment,” thus those became two of the main coding categories. Under “entertainment,” the potential factors include “music,” “lyrics,” “parody,” and “popular culture.” “Music” was chosen because research has indicated it is primarily sought after by internet users and is also the category on YouTube with the highest number of views. Comments including statements involving the words “music,” “song,” “tune” or other words specifically related to music were coded under this category. After browsing some of the comments on the “I’m Elmo and I Know It” video, the coders noticed that several of the comments were quotes from the video, which led them to add the factor “lyrics” as a potential “entertainment” factor. When the user specifically quoted “lyrics” from the video, this category was coded. “Humor” was

originally a factor; however, coders worried that having “humor” and “funny” as factors in two different categories would be confusing. To alleviate this confusion, “humor” was taken out of the “entertainment” category and the “funny” factor in the “emotion” category was changed to “funny/humor.” Finally, “parody” and “popular culture” were selected because memetic videos are based upon these two factors, and since “I’m Farming and I Grow It” is a memetic video, it is assumed these factors will be mentioned by users. Coders indicated it was a “parody” if the comment mentioned the word “parody” or the original song. If the actual name of the original song “I’m Sexy and I Know It” or the original artist, LMFAO, were mentioned, then coders chose the “popular culture” category.

The next coded category was “information,” which includes “farming basics,” “farming lifestyle,” “farming equipment,” “food creation” and “farming is fun.” These factors were chosen based on the lyrics of “I’m Farming and I Grow It,” which can be found in Appendix F.

Shifman (2011) found that a focus on “ordinary people” was one of the main reasons certain memetic videos became popular. Based on this research, the “main actor in video” category was created. This category assumes that users might watch and comment on the video based on the boys in the video. This category consists of comments on “age,” “attractiveness,” “physique,” “authority on topic,” “ordinary,” “setting” and “voice quality.” It is assumed that certain physical qualities might attract viewers, such as the boys’ age, attractiveness and physique. In addition, how much they know about farming makes them an authority on the topic and could be a reason why viewers express enjoyment when watching this video. As Shifman (2011) pointed out, viewers like to watch “ordinary people” so that was added as a factor. It is believed that the “setting” of the video, a farm in Kansas, may be appealing to viewers who feel

a sense of connection to those ties. Finally, it is suspected that viewers might just like the sound of the boys' voices.

To determine the possible opinion leaders' influence, two different categories regarding the source of information were included. Those are "relationship to the sender" and "source of shared content." In "relationship to the sender," the factors include "relative," "friend," "agriculture authority" and "other." Previous research is not definitive on whether an endorsement from a source with a close relationship to the viewer is more reliable than an endorsement from an expert. This study seeks to find which of those sources may be more credible by identifying the type of sender most often mentioned in comments. Also, researchers have attributed several different ways to share viral content and this study seeks to find which types of sharing are the most popular. The factors include "email," "blog," "word of mouth," "mainstream media," "Facebook," "Twitter" and "other."

Lange (2007) found that quality of the YouTube video is not important to users. However, the Peterson brothers spent hours filming the video and editing it on iMovie to create a semi-professional video (Associate Press, 2012). Koehler (2012) believes the quality of this video is one of the reasons for its success; it is almost-professional so it looks more authentic, but it doesn't have a "high-gloss corporate polish." To test this reasoning, the coding category "video quality" was added to the coding book. The factors include "professional," "semi-professional," "amateur" and "poor."

As stated earlier, Lange and other researchers consider YouTube a unique form of social interaction, where participation is imperative. Because of that, "participation" was added as a coding category with the following factors: "replying to a comment," "posting another video," "liking a comment," "mention sharing" and "other." In some instances, viewers will post their

own video response or parody which is why that was added as a factor. Other users can also “like” a user’s comment, so if a comment has multiple “likes,” it may be assumed that others share that same sentiment. In addition, browsing the comments on “I’m Elmo and I Know It” revealed that some users actually comment that they will share this with a certain individual, so the “share” factor was added into the category.

It is expected that not all of the comments will fall under these categories, because sometimes comments are either in another language or have nothing to do with the video the viewer is commenting on. To account for this, the “other” category was added.

A sample of the 11,320 comments was used for this study. Since users continue to post comments on this video nine months later, the comments were chosen starting from the first comments posted on June 25, 2012 to posts entered April 10, 2013. The coding began at the first comment posted on the video. It is believed the first poster may be an “opinion leader” since he or she is one of the first people to view the video and the first user to take the next step of interaction and leave a comment. Also, the content of this comment is valuable to the study to determine what factors motivated this potential “opinion leader” to leave a comment. It is also believed this comment may set the tone for the following comments. For example, if the first user posts a positive comment, other users may be motivated to also write positive comments. Thus, the first comment is a vital source of information. Following the first comment, every third comment was coded, skipping over any comments that were removed based on inappropriate content or too many negative votes. Every third comment was chosen because this number gave a good sample size and followed the thread of from the first users through those who posted nine months later. The sample totaled 2,950.

## Chapter 4 - Results

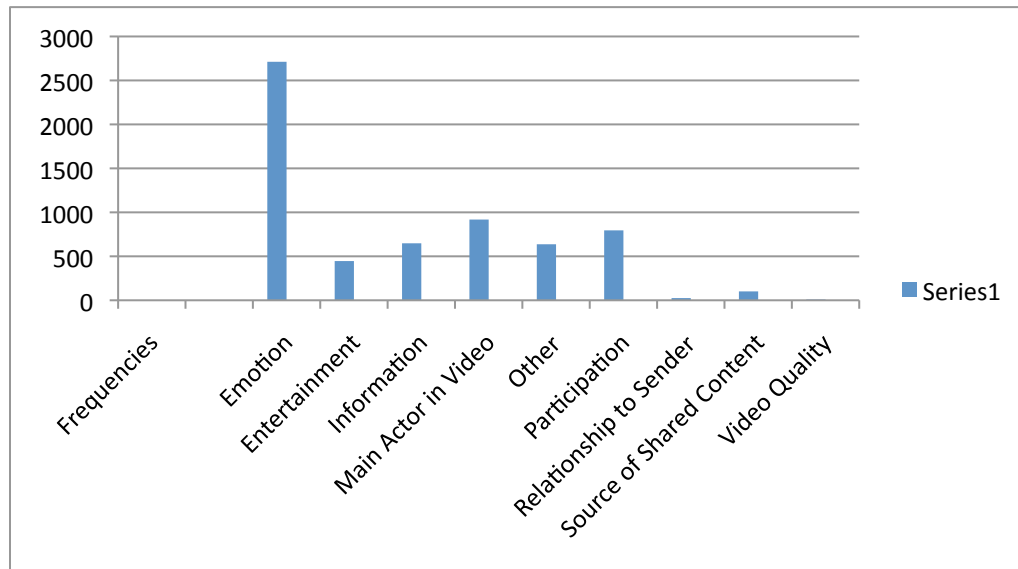
Greg Peterson, the eldest Peterson brother, is currently an Agriculture Communications major at Kansas State University. In response to the interview questions he was asked in this study, he said his reason for creating “I’m Farming and I Grow It” was to promote agriculture more than it was already being promoted (Greg Peterson, April 2013). Since he had posted several other videos on the brothers’ YouTube channel in the past, Greg got the idea to do a parody. While sitting in the Sonic parking lot in Manhattan, Kansas, he started thinking of alternative words to the song “I’m Sexy and I Know It,”—lyrics in Appendix G-- a song he was not particularly fond of, but which he thought had a catchy beat (Llorens, 2009). Once the video was posted, Greg said he and his brothers did not do much to spread the word about their video (Greg Peterson, April 2013). They posted it on their personal Facebook pages and Twitter, but the highest number of views they expected was about 100,000. By April 2013, the video has received more than 8,454,408 views.

This study’s research question asks “What factors enticed viewers to watch ‘I’m Farming and I Grow It?’” Greg believes the reason the video went viral is because it appeals to just about everyone through its “humor, catchy music, funny lyrics, cute baby animals, three brothers, a hardworking family, epic camera shots that we are not sure how we got, and above all I think a lot of people in this country are still connected to the farm in some way.” (Greg Peterson, April 2013).

## *Frequencies*

Results from the content analysis of the video comments show users considered some of these factors suggested by Greg important. The chart in Figure 1 clearly shows which factors were mentioned the most in these comments.

**Figure 1**



As this figure shows, the predominant category mentioned in the comments was “emotion.”

## **Emotion**

Figure 2 shows how often each of the types of emotions was mentioned in the comments. The comments are stated verbatim when used in this study so the grammatical or punctual inaccuracies are what users typed in their original post. Out of the nine different categories coded, “emotion” appeared in comments most often. It was in 91 percent of the total comments. Of the 2,712 comments that contained “emotion,” 45.2 percent were complimentary. In other words, users praised the creators’ efforts.

**Figure 2**

<b>Emotion</b>		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Joy	740	27.2
2. Anger	174	6.4
3. Disappointment	71	2.6
4. Surprise	74	2.7
5. Funny/Humor	433	15.9
6. Complimentary	1225	45.2
TOTAL	2712	

Although humor wasn't the leading category as Greg had suspected, the majority of the comments, 88 percent, did involve some form of positive emotion, whether that be "joy," "funny/humor," or "complimentary." This comment is an example of the "funny/humor" categorization.

**singergrlkam:** BAhahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha LMHO (laugh my head off)

Other comments, like the one below, purely expressed "joy."

**Li Eliasson:** Love it =) Li Sweden

As Figure 1 shows, the majority of the comments were in the "complimentary" category. Below is an example of a comment including compliments.

**SRCJO1481:** Good job guys!



Several comments also contained two of these emotions. This is an example of a comment containing both “joy” and “complimentary” phrases.

**JoJoGotYoYOu:** You guys gave me the biggest smile of my week!! God bless all of you and for the work you do also!! ☺

The emotion “funny” was also often lumped in with “joy” and “complimentary” comments, such as:

**Natejess1999:** Love, love, love this! Great jobs and thanks for the laughs!

The two factors with the lowest frequencies were “anger” and “disappointment,” with “disappointment” only mentioned in 2 percent of the comments involving “emotion.” “Anger” comments were usually directed at other users instead of the creators of the video. The example below is two different users who argued back and forth several different occasions within the time period of this study.

**scotthinch:** I may have been a little harsh, doesn't mean I agree with the fact you think we are stupid for likeing [sic] this video. thanks

**DLB01992:** I know at least two strangers who are now pissed on me now...:D and yes, my mum is so proud of me ☺

**scotthinch:** you have to be the biggest retard I have run across yet. I read alot of your retarded comments, are you pissed off at the whole world or what is your problem? You sound really angry...

### **Main Actor in Video**

The next coded category with the largest number of mentions in the 2,950 comments was the “main actor in video.” While the factors in this category were not mentioned nearly as often as the “emotion” factors, 31 percent of the overall comments did mention some aspect of the “main actor in video.” Figure 3 shows the frequencies for these categories.

**Figure 3**

<b>Main Actor in Video</b>		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Age	17	1.8
2. Attractiveness	148	16.1
3. Physique	16	1.7
4. Occupation	335	36.5
5. Ordinary	43	4.8
6. Setting	352	38.3
7. Voice Quality	7	0.8
TOTAL	918	

Within this category, there were two factors mentioned most often, “setting” at 38.3 percent and “occupation” at 36.5 percent. “Setting,” the factor mentioned most in the “main actor in video” section, usually referred to the setting of the video, or users would name their own setting, often in an attempt to relate to the “actors.” These two comments are examples of this classification:

**Sackboy09100:** GO KANSAS

**Caitlyn Smith:** From Minnesota and I totally relate! :P You guys are too cute!

The comments involving “occupation” were any comments that mentioned being a farmer, like the ones below:

**CalebPutnam1:** I know how you guys feel I’m a farmer too

**MrHunkalicious:** OH S\*\*\*--- now I think farmers are bad a\*\* !!

An interesting find during the content analysis was that several users also mentioned being a farmer or growing up on a farm. In future research, this identification may be tied to relating to the actors or considering the actors “ordinary.” For the purposes of this research, the “ordinary” factor was much more strictly defined as mentions of knowing the boys in the video, going to the same school, or being from the same town:

**Laurie Davis:** I’m sitting with a friend of the family...these people are REAL!!

**OoberMcAwesome:** The guys made this video is my favorite teacher’s buddy!!!! They went to kstate together [sic]

Although not as prevalent as the “setting” and “occupation” factors, “attractiveness” was another factor several users mentioned in their comments:

**hoovesandhearts24:** Sweet video! Nice lookn’ guys too! ;)

**tadpole430:** I'm a city gal and I think these guys are HUNKS. Every girl LOVES a hard working man. Better spend more time on the farm! Good job guys!

In addition to the “attractiveness” factor, some users also commented on the boys’ physiques. Only 16 of the 918 comments referenced physique; below is an example of one of them:

**lillyfredrick1:** Farming sure does give you biceps

### **Participation**

The next highest category coded in the “I’m Farming and I Grow It” comments was the “participation” category. Of the total coded comments, 27 percent mentioned or used some form of participation. Figure 4 shows these frequencies, with the two factors having the highest frequencies being “reply to a comment” and “liking a comment.”

**Figure 4**

<b>Participation</b>		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Reply to comment	309	38.9
2. Posting another video	15	1.9
3. Liking a comment	302	38
4. Mention sharing	69	8.7
5. Other	99	12.5
TOTAL	795	

In the “participation” category, the highest amount of involvement was through “replying to a comment,” a factor which accounted for almost 39 percent of the comments involving participation; however, “liking a comment” was not far behind with 38 percent. As

shown above in the “emotion” category, many of the comments involving “replying to a comment” were arguments among users. Many times, these arguments were not directly in relation to the video. For example, these users are responding to another user who stated that it is illegal immigrants who work on farms:

**TaylorMarie831:** You are one dumb sob. It’s mostly high school kids. White high school kids. Kids that they have know [sic] for YEARS. Kids that were born in the USA.

**Matthew Kelley:** You’re thinking of crops that require manual labor to harvest (strawberries, that sort of thing). I doubt you’ll see many migrant workers running combines.

When “liking a comment” was coded as a factor, it only accounted for the fact that the comment had “likes,” but did not take into account the number of “likes” for each comment. The researchers decided it was best to categorize the number of “likes” as one form of “participation” since the study was primarily identifying if “participation” was involved in some way in helping a video go viral.

While only 9 percent of the users mentioned sharing this video, it did provide interesting insight into another form of sharing:

**Alex Kasza:** On the back of our FFA (Future Farmers of America) sweatshirts at school  
xD

**kteachone:** I love it! I'm showing this to my Pre-K class!

**Jasmine Holmes:** lol we showed this at a field trip for school every1 started dancing

Only about 2 percent of the “participation” categories involved posting a video in response. In these comments, an actual video was not posted; rather the user suggested another video to watch. Interestingly, the video links were not provided by the users, merely the titles as in the comments below:

**thejunkman:** Have you checked out my Ag videos? You would like my Faming in Nebraska video.

**2005abl:** go watch “parabolas and hyperbolas” it is are very similar to this its hilarious you guys will love it (:

The “other” form of participation occurred when users indicated they had added this video to their playlist. The comments in the “other” form often involved music in some way. Some commentators suggested adding the parody to their YouTube playlist or requesting the song as a mobile application or iTunes song:

**Nicholas Irlbeck:** haha you should put this on itunes

**MrNate101551:** you should get this on spotify

While it was hypothesized that “information” and “entertainment” would be two of the categories most often mentioned in the comments, this was not the case. Instead of having the

highest number of mentions in comments, the frequency for “information” and “entertainment” was below several other factors. “Information” was mentioned in 22 percent of the comments, which is slightly more than the “entertainment” category.

**Information**

Figure 5 shows the frequencies of the comments containing “information.” Among this category, it is clear that certain factors were favored.

**Figure 5**

Information		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Farming Basics	40	7.1
2. Farming Lifestyle	181	28
3. Farming Equipment	77	12.1
4. Food Creation	319	49.2
5. Farming is Fun	23	3.6
TOTAL	648	

Almost half of the comments referenced “food creation.” The comments contain a variation on this topic, from talking about particular food the farmers create to making a general statement about farmers feeding America or the world. Below are examples of comments coded under “food creation”:

**ucgeerealty:** Great job with the video and relaying positive information about farming.

Too many people think their food comes from the grocery store. They have no idea about how much work and expense is involved in production agriculture.

**karen wright:** when I gewt [sic] up early to make hubbys lunch and feed chickens and dogs and ferrets I think of the part of this song gatta [sic] feed everybody gatta [sic] feed everybody and laugh to myself thanks for this cool song

**Edwin Cotto:** That was great...Keeping feeding everybody

The second most-mentioned “information” factor was “farming lifestyle,” which was mentioned in 28 percent of the comments in this “information” category. These comments often referred to the hours and hard work put in daily by farmers, and some users related their own farming lives, like the comment below.

**Rob Wright:** I am sooooo glad that I don't have to wake up early and milk the cows, or spend a cold fall day till dusk harvesting grain. I am so glad there are people out there willing to put in what it takes to run a farm. Because when the farmer stops growing...we city folks starve.

About 12 percent of the users commented on the type of equipment mentioned in the video. In this category, users mentioned specific types of farming equipment:

**Kc White:** u driving the tractors er' what?

**Don Cherry:** man those hay bale machines are awesome



**yagsishtgmo:** basically it a new Holland tractor backward with a header of there win rowing series mowers I cant think of the technical name but it is definantly [sic] made by new Holland I have seen one b4 at an auction

“Farming basics” and “farming is fun” were the least mentioned factors in this category, with the “basics” accounting for 7.1 percent of the comments and “farming is fun” accounting for 3.6 percent.

### **Entertainment**

The following category, “entertainment,” was only mentioned in about 15 percent of the users’ comments. Figure 6 shows these frequencies.

**Figure 6**

Entertainment		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Music	109	24.4
2. Lyrics	145	32.5
3. Parody	133	29.8
4. Popular Culture	59	13.3
TOTAL	446	

The two most prevalent factors in this category are “lyrics” and “parody.” Comments in the “entertainment” category mentioned “lyrics” the most often, accounting for 32 percent of the comments in this category. There are two sets of specific lyrics from the Peterson song that were primarily mentioned: a line about water and a line about working outside. The comment below exemplifies both lyrics.

**Tanya Frizzell:** Water WaterWater [sic] Water Water YEAHH!! Hahahahaha ☺ Uh Huh  
I work out....SIDE!! Love this!!

The “parody” factor was close behind the “lyric” factor, with almost 30 percent of the “entertainment” comments mentioning either the word “parody” or that “this song is better than the original song.”

**BelxUmbreon:** Lol best parody ever xD

**Isaiah Perry:** It’s about dang time they made parody of that horrible song!

Only 13.3 percent of the comments coded in the “entertainment” category related to popular culture, meaning they mentioned the original artist or song by name, like this example:

**TheMegawebkinzfan:** Ha ha! Best parody ever of I’m sexy and I know it ☺

While few users mentioned the original song “I’m Sexy and I Know It,” some users did compare this video to other well-known parodies, like those from artist Al Yankovic:

**ProNorden:** Both funny and curiously encouraging re [sic] a particularly cool part of our culture & economy. Sorta/partly in the rarefied & excellent category of Yankovic’s “Amish Paradise.”

In this category, the factor mentioned the least was “music,” which still accounted for about 25 percent of the comments in this category. As stated earlier, this factor was coded when users referenced the word “song” or “music,” such as these comments:

**caohorse:** my new favorite song.....

**Hannah Pehle:** Best song ever!

**Source of Shared Content**

Users commented on the “source of the shared content” only 3 percent of the time, with more than 70 percent of those comments mentioning mainstream media. Figure 7 shows these frequencies.

**Figure 7**

Source of Shared Content		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Email	0	0
2. Blog	0	0
3. Word of Mouth	0	0
4. Mainstream Media	73	72.3
5. Facebook	10	9.9
6. Twitter	0	0
7. Other	18	17.8
TOTAL	101	

Within the comments mentioning “mainstream media,” primarily television stations or programs were mentioned. Some users mentioned local news programs, while many others said they first saw the video on a national news program:

**Sean McWhinnie:** FOX news this morning was making a big deal of it. I found it hilarious, and so did FOX.

**Jean Louise Kennedy:** Really enjoyed this! I saw it on FOX yesterday and posted it to my FB! Love it! Farmers rule!

### Relationship to Sender

Even fewer users mentioned the “relationship to sender.” Figure 8 shows these frequencies.

**Figure 8**

Relationship to Sender		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Relative	3	12
2. Friend	4	16
3. Agriculture Authority	5	20
4. Other	12	48
TOTAL	25	

Based on previous research, it was expected that either a person close to the user or someone considered a credible authority would be the main source of shared video. While that still may be the case, users rarely mentioned watching this video based on a recommendation from one of these two types of sources. When they did, it was usually a “relative” or “agriculture authority”:

**Mckenna Brohl:** LOL! Literally my brother jus [sic] showed this to me, omg (oh my god) love it more than the original version!! Good job boys!

**Jennifer A:** Saw this at National FFA (Future Farmers of America) Convention. You guys are very talented!

More than half of the comments mentioned a “teacher” as the person who referred the user to this video. The teacher was often in a non-agricultural field, as mentioned in these comments:

**sistersarah4567:** My Christian school teacher actually showed me this during devotion!!  
The one with the light blonde hair is pretty cute! 😊

**Kate Arrambidez:** Lmao (laugh my a\*\* off) my geography teacher showed me this

**clbarks2:** Watched this in science class 😊

A handful of the comments mentioned learning about the video from unexpected places like this comment:

**HannahLovesUke:** Everyone should watch this!! My nurse told me about this when I went to get my physical for Farm camp 😊

### **Video Quality**

Finally, the frequencies for the “video quality” category are in Figure 9. Only 9 users mentioned the “video quality” and the comments ranged in their descriptions.

**Figure 9**

Video Quality		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Professional	3	33.4
2. Semi-Professional	4	44.4
3. Amateur	2	22.2
4. Poor	0	0
TOTAL	9	

Most comments that did mention videography were complimentary, but hard to categorize such as the one below.

**2002JGGICE:** I thought you guys did a fantastic job of re-writing the lyrics and also videography. Some really beautiful shots!

**Other**

The “other” category accounted for 22 percent of the comments; however, since the answers were a range of answers, these frequencies are listed last in Figure 10.

**Figure 10**

Other		
	Frequency	Percentage
1. Other	637	100
TOTAL	637	

Some of these comments pertained to issues within the agricultural field such as genetically modified organisms, referred to as GMO, or the use of immigrant workers. These “other” comments about agriculture disputes that did not have to do with the lyrics of “I’m Farming and I Grow It” usually occurred in patterns. For instance, two or more users would be

arguing with each other about GMO approximately one month after the video was posted and then GMO would be scarcely mentioned in the later comments. However, a new dispute would usually arise, such as the use of immigrant workers. This is another argument unrelated to the video that would be avidly debated among users, but would fade out. Below are some examples of comments containing these disputes or “other” agriculture issues. Also, it is worth noting that these comments below were coded as a reply to another user’s comment, however, the other user’s comment may not be mentioned because it was not part of the sample.

**HarrisFarmMaine:** GMO crops are used because that is what is available to us to allow us to do our jobs....I’m no fan of Monsanto, but you need to remember why us farmers use their products.

**H3LL4S1Q:** I am a farmer and I am definitely not an illegal immigrant. Neither are any other of the famers or employees I’ve ever worked with. The color of your skin has NOTHING to do with farming, except that it will be a lot darker by the end of your first season.

**TaylorMarie831:** You are one dumb sob. It’s mostly high school kids. White high school kids. Kids that they have know [sic] for YEARS. Kids that were born in the USA.

The researcher also noticed one user who acted primarily as the antagonist, often trying to rile other users by arguing with them or using very foul language. This user was 888LICA and his comments, as well as how other users responded to him, are below:

**888LICA:** hahah you rich cuz you have many people and large territory but if you so rich, tell me why in ur country not free health care?

**aniconanfan:** Dude, I'm from Asia, which is geographically a lot closer to Russia than the USA. And we chose to take a 24 hour plane ride to the USA than a few hours to your country. Don't ever think that your racist brain knows everything about other people or country.

**888LICA:** ok those world stats know nothing, I could go to USA Philadelphia and say by, it it is 3<sup>rd</sup> world developing country

**The MixNation:** So now you also worked for the statistics board? And, apparently have a Masters in American culture as well? If you had a third foot, you would probably stick that in your mouth as well.

**888LICA:** NO way jose if I hate usa and this vid

**888LICA:** no dumb I don't hate latinos and I only hate n\*\*\*\*s if they behave violent like in some counterirs [sic]

In contrast to the disputes, several of the comments in the “other” category were positive, but they just did not fit into one of the designated categories. For instance, many users commented on the adorable cat licking milk out of a bowl or the expressions on the faces of the



cows when the Peterson brothers danced in front of them. Likewise, many users comments on the dance moves performed by the farmers, something that was not accounted for when coding the “main actor in video” category. Examples of these comments are below:

**sinaxx98:** 1:46 lovely cat ☺

**Brittany Denmark:** awww the cows are so cute and that little kitten

**pinkfeathers2006:** I love the cattle in the background...they're like “wtf? Is going on here...” Awesome video!!

**Dillon Freed:** The only time the lawn mower dance looked cool!

**Rafael Block:** 2:40 startin' the chain saw! My favorite dance step!

Another group of the “other” category comments also appeared to show a meme within the comment section of this memetic video. Throughout the nine months' worth of comments, several different users commented on the number of “dislikes” on the video and these comments often stereotyped the users who were “disliking” the video in a mocking and sometimes angry tone.

**kena white:** 1,447 offended vegetarians :( poor babies :P

**Preston Jones:** 1,137 people can go hungry and go without food

**jeremymarshall1995:** 387 people want the cows to starve

These frequencies provided an understanding of what many users mentioned when posting comments on “I’m Farming and I Grow It.” To further understand the gratifications received from this video, the hypotheses were evaluated.

### ***Hypotheses***

The first hypothesis of this study is as follows:

*H1: Videos like “I’m Farming and I Grow It” go viral because they present relevant information in an entertaining way.*

This hypothesis is only partially supported by the results of this content analysis. Several comments were almost verbatim of what this hypothesis expected, with users expressing their joy from the informative, yet entertaining, video. A cross-tabulation between the “information” and “entertainment” categories does give a statistically significant result, indicating that when a comment mentions an “entertainment” factor, an “information” factor is most likely included in the same comment. However, cross-tabulation tests did not indicate there was any significance between the “information” and “entertainment” categories and “participation,” which shows that “information” and “entertainment” are often in the same category, but that does not conclude that these factors lead to sharing the video. Despite this lack of significance, other cross tabulations did show significant results that “entertainment” is often connected with “emotion.” “Emotion” is significantly connected to “participation” so these tests indicate there may indeed be a connection between the “entertainment” category and “participation.”

Evaluation of this hypothesis first began with the specific comments that stated the hypothesis almost word for word, like the ones below.

**56leozen:** What a great piece of refreshing wisdom placed within a humorous offering by three exceptional brothers! I hope that everyone sees it!

**stueve12:** Great job guys! This was hilarious and informative for those that don't know anything about farming!!

**drdale18:** Great video – fun and educational – I hope it plays over and over at the Kansas State Fair this fall.

**juschillin:** I thought it was funny...I didn't realize, they do feed a lot of people

**Alisha Fregoe:** This was awesome, too many people in America are ignorant to how important agriculture is!! They need funny things like these!! I love it!!

**scotthinch:** thanks for seeing this video for what it is, funny and educational at the same time.

**scotthinch:** learn how to laugh and learn at the same time! I think about these guys and everyone else who raises what you eat when you stick something in your mouth!

**Figure 11**

Information and Entertainment					
	Farming Basics	Farming Lifestyle	Farming Equipment	Food Creation	Farming is Fun
Music	2	8	1	4	0
Lyrics	0	6	0	13	0
Parody	2	9	1	2	0
Popular Culture	1	0	1	2	0
Total	5	23	3	21	0
Pearson Chi-Square	0.057				
Likelihood Ratio	0.022				

As the comments above show, “information” and “entertainment” factors are often expressed in the same category. The results of a cross-tabulation between these two categories do prove significance, indicating that when an “information” factor is mentioned in a comment, it is usually in association with an “entertainment” factor. While the results show significance, the factors are too divided to determine a clear connection. Figure 11 shows the results of the Chi-Square tests.

A result is considered significant if it is .05 or below, showing there is less than a 95 percent chance this result could have happened by accident. The Likelihood Ratio for this cross-tabulation is .022, a significant number meaning when one factor in the “information” category is mentioned, it is often mentioned in relation to one or more factors in the “entertainment” category. The Pearson Chi-Square test does not show significance, but it is very close at .057.

As Figure 11 shows, the main factor mentioned in the “information” category is “farming lifestyle.” However, it connects to a range of factors in the “entertainment” category, suggesting that this information was coded along with either “music,” “lyrics” or “parody.” Also, it appears that users often mention “food creation” when they are quoting “lyrics.” This is probably

because most of the comments involving lyrics were direct quotes from the “I’m Farming and I Grow It” video and many of the lyrics in the video referred to the hard work it takes to feed the world.

While these results are significant, they do not show that “information” and “entertainment” are the reason this video went viral, especially considering these two categories did not have the leading number of frequencies. “Information” and “entertainment” were not mentioned in 80 percent of the overall comments as expected; instead each of these categories individually was mentioned by users in about 20 percent of the overall comments. Since these categories had a smaller frequency, the connection between these two is not as substantial as results in earlier studies.

However, there was still a level of significance between the two, so these two categories were then tested with “participation.” This analysis failed to yield any significance, indicating that neither “information” nor “entertainment” leads to “liking a comment” or “sharing the video.”

The next step was to consider a more indirect connection of “information” and “entertainment” with “participation.” Another cross-tabulation shows there may be a correlation between the “emotional reaction” users reported feeling from the video’s “entertainment” and their desire to share the video based on that “emotional reaction.” Figure 12 shows the cross-tabulation between “entertainment” and “emotional reaction.” As these figures indicate, there is a very strong significance-- $.000$ —between “entertainment” and “emotional reaction.”

**Figure 12**

Entertainment and Emotional Reaction						
	Joy	Anger	Disappointment	Surprise	Funny	Complimentary
Music	32	6	3	1	8	38
Lyrics	28	1	1	3	30	17
Parody	22	1	5	5	15	45
Popular Culture	5	3	0	0	5	9
Total	87	11	9	9	58	109
Pearson Chi-Square	0.000					
Likelihood Ratio	0.000					

There are three main factors within the emotion category that are connected to “entertainment,” all of which are happy emotions. “Joy” was most often mentioned in the same comment referencing “music,” “lyrics” or “parody.” “Music” and “joy” had the strongest connection with 32 comments involving both factors. The results of the comments praising the creators were quite similar to “joy,” but the “parody” and “music” factors were most often mentioned when the user was praising the video. The “funny” category had only one clear connection and that was when comments contained “lyrics,” the user also said the video was “funny.”

Based on this cross-tabulation, it is clear that when users mentioned some “entertainment” aspect of the video, they also associated that characteristic with a positive emotion. This positive emotion can also be linked to sharing the video, as Figures 13 shows. According to the Pearson Chi-Square test, there is a strong significance between “emotional reaction” and “participation,” with a value of .000.

The majority of “participation” involved comments with “complimentary” messages. Of the comments containing “complimentary” messages, the form of “participation” most often used in conjunction with this “emotion” was “liking a comment.” This connection shows that most users praised the Peterson brothers and their video; many more users also “liked” those praises, increasing the positivity surrounding this video.

**Figure 13**

Emotional Reaction and Participation						
	Joy	Anger	Disappointment	Surprise	Funny	Complimentary
Reply to comment	16	76	8	4	17	18
Posting another video	2	0	0	0	2	3
Liking a comment	74	6	7	8	22	95
Mention sharing	19	0	1	2	9	17
Other	29	2	1	0	9	17
Total	139	84	17	14	59	150
Pearson Chi-Square	0.000					
Likelihood Ratio	0.000					

Within all the factors involving positive emotion, the type of participation most common was “liking a comment.” For the more negative or sad emotions, the most common form of participation was “replying to a comment.” Most importantly, when users’ comments fell into the “disappointing” or “angry” category, the user was responding to another user instead of commenting on an aspect of the actual video. Some examples of these response comments are below:

**SuperYowatup:** hey u shut up@donmour

**MegaCode18:** @Allen Diaz Ohh 25¢ holly f\*\*\* that’s a lot I can almost buy...Nothing

The results in Figure 13 suggest that a happy emotion excites the user, thus motivating the user to share the video with others. Since “entertainment” had a significant connection to positive emotion, “entertainment” may influence “participation.” This connection does support Hypothesis #1 but there is not enough data to support this hypothesis completely. Although user comments did specifically reference enjoying the video because it presents relevant information in an entertaining way, the cross-tabulations between these two categories—“information” and “entertainment”-- and “participation” were not significant. Therefore, the first hypothesis is only partially supported.

Hypothesis 2 states the following:

*H2: For a video to go viral, it must pertain to popular culture, defined as items that are well known and generally accepted cultural patterns that are widespread within a population.*

Analysis of the data does not support this hypothesis. Cross-tabulations did not produce significant results between the “popular culture” and “participation” categories; however, that may be because the data coded was too narrowly defined and did not fully portray “popular culture.” Comments made by users also suggest that there may be a connection to the number of views this video received and the song it parodied, but that link might be for a different reason than hypothesized. The comments show that a number of people did not like the original song and preferred the Peterson brothers’ version because the message is more wholesome.

The first step in evaluating this hypothesis was to run a cross-tabulation of “entertainment”--which includes the factor “popular culture”—with the “participation” category. As discussed under the previous hypothesis’s analysis, there was no significance between users



who commented on “entertainment” factors and those who mentioned some form of “participation,” indicating that a user who mentioned “entertainment” did not necessarily feel obligated to “share” the video.

To determine if “popular culture,” or the memetic features of parodying a popular video, was related to the enjoyment factor, the cross-tabulation illustrated in Figure 12 between the categories “entertainment” and “emotional reaction” was revisited. As noted earlier, this cross-tabulation did produce significant results. However, when further analyzed, the “popular culture” alone did not lead to an “emotional reaction.” This may be because the “popular culture” factor was so narrowly defined, pertaining to only comments that mentioned the name of the original song or artist. Yet, that may not be the only indication of “popular culture.” The “parody” factor was coded when a user mentioned the word “parody” or the phrase “original song,” but did not include the original song title. Taking this into account, it is believed that the “parody” factor could also be considered “popular culture.” Mentioning the word “parody” indicates the user knew this video was based on an original song and the term itself could even be considered a “popular culture” trend.

So although the “popular culture” factor alone did not yield a significant connection to “emotional reaction,” the combination of the factors “popular culture” and “parody” did. Together, the two factors account for a total of 40 percent of the comments mentioning some form of emotion, with the majority mentioning a positive emotion.

The significance between these factors and “participation” may be even greater than indicated. When the “liking a comment” factor was coded for a comment, it only accounted for the fact that a comment was “liked,” but did not take into account the number of “likes” on that

comment. Certain comments had dozens, even hundreds of likes. For example, a comment made by jojobreaker—shown below—had 75 likes.

**jojobreaker:** OMG!! MAKE YOUR OWN ALBUM GUYS! THIS IS SERIOUSLY BETTER THAN THE REAL SONG!

It appears the “popular culture” and “parody” factors are usually mentioned in comments that also mention positive emotions. In many instances, the users are complimenting the Peterson brothers’ video and several said that this video is better than the original video “I’m Sexy and I Know It.”

**Thyme131:** WOW this song is way better then the real thing! THEY DO ANIMALS!!!!

**leanne9298:** Better then the original!! This reminds me why country boys are definitely the best

**MG Projekt:** great reworking of this well-known song can compete with the original, and this video

**VishouslySmart:** OMG!!!! I LOVE THIS!!!! ITS BETTER THAN THE ORIGINAL SONG!!!

**grandmashorses:** I love this song. Its SO much better then I'm sexy and I know it. And yall are much sexyier then the people in the music video of im sexy and I know it. LOVE YALL KEEP MAKING AWESOME VIDEOS!!!

**bullmastiffmommy2be:** Saw this on FOX....AWESOME! You guys are FAB! LOVE THIS! So clever and hilarious! I thought the original song was great, but I love your version so MUCH better! Haha We appreciate all that you and all USA farmers do for us!

However, the connection between positive emotions and the “popular culture” and “parody” factors is a bit deceiving. Some users went beyond complimenting the Peterson brothers on doing a better job than the original song and expressed their dislike for the original song, lyrics or artist. Some of the comments also praised the boys for their use of clean lyrics in comparison to the lyrics by LMFAO, which may be considered raunchy.

**Scott Noble:** Can't stand the real song, but this is AWESOME!!!! Also have much respect to you guys for what you do. Your right we won't have anything if it wasn't for you. So thanks.

**roselover411:** This is so cool. Infinitely better than the original, no contest. This is way, I'll even say sexier, than LMFAO's song. They are really creepy, but you guys are awesome.

**JAMES ANDERSON:** haha I hate the original song but this is awesome. Ich bin der farmer

**TakeTwoFails:** Nice work guys! Good idea and good creativity! Something clean and fun. Congrats, loved it!

**Jay Reese:** Probably one of my favorite videos on Youtube! Great to see a clean well thought out video with a wholesome message! Keep up the great work and work ethic Peterson Family!

**iroku18isleku2:** AND ITS SO LESS INAPPopriate [sic] than the real version...<3

**DRIFTINWOOD34:** Good job boys. You made a horrible song great in less than 2 days. Now that's real talent. Let's see some more.

**BabsERNurse:** Fabulous! It's so nice to see some fresh faces with nice healthy complexions and NO piercings or tats! You just have to love mid-western young men! Clean, hard working and in shape, no party-faced video game complexions on these fellow, no sir.

These comments suggest that “popular culture” may have played a role in helping this video into going viral, but this boost may not be because of a fondness of current pop culture as expected. Instead, some of the users seem to appreciate the farming video because the lyrics are

not as crude as the hit song it is parodying. For example, some of the lyrics for “I’m Sexy and I Know It” are: “Everybody stops and is staring at me. I got passion in my pants and I ain’t afraid to show it, show it, show it, show it.” In contrast, these are the lyrics by the Peterson brothers for the same section of the song: “All the hungry cattle are staring at me. I got passion for my plants and I ain’t afraid to show it, show it, show it, show it.” These lyrics are also quoted by some of the users.

**Karen D:** I got passion for my plants and I ain’t afraid to show it!

There is a clear difference in the message being presented in “I’m Farming and I Grow It” compared to the original song, and it may be that viewers preferred the wholesome message over the racy messages in “I’m Sexy and I Know It.”

Another observation to note is that popular culture may vary with generations. As part of the interview, Greg Peterson provided YouTube analytics, or demographic data, for the video. In 2011, YouTube began providing subscribers with data identifying the demographics for viewers of that subscriber’s video. In addition, YouTube provided information on where the viewing traffic originated and how viewers are sharing the video. The demographics show that more than half of the viewers of “I’m Farming and I Grow It” are in the 45-64 age range. The farming video is a parody of an LMFAO song, a band that is in the Top 40 music genre, a genre usually geared toward young adults. This generational difference may have been the reason why “parodies” and “popular culture” were not factors mentioned as often as expected. On the other hand, this may be the reason the video went viral: because it is a clean take on a raunchy pop

culture song. Either way, there is not enough data to tell what kind of effect “popular culture” had on the spread of this video, so this hypothesis is not supported.

The third hypothesis is as follows:

*H3: An endorsement by a credible source or opinion leader will spark the amount of interest in a video and therefore increase the number of views.*

A variety of results show this hypothesis is supported and that a credible source or “opinion leader” is a necessity for creators who want their videos to go viral. Cross-tabulations show a strong, significant connection between “source of shared content” and “participation,” with “mainstream media” identified as the main factor leading to “participation.” In addition, YouTube analytics show direct traffic, viewers reaching the video through a direct link posted on some other form of media, was the main source of traffic to the video. One medium that was a provider for the direct link is Facebook, which accounted for a large majority of the “shares” of the video. This means Facebook users saw a post about the video on one of their “friends” sites and “shared” it with their own group of “friends.” Earlier comments made by the Peterson brothers suggested Senator Pat Roberts may have been the “opinion leader” who started getting the video noticed through his post on Facebook. YouTube analytics show support for this suggestion, thus indicating the importance of an “opinion leader” when a video goes viral.

Cross-tabulations show significant support for this hypothesis. Figure 14 shows the Chi-Square test between the “source of shared content” and “participation.” The Pearson Chi-Square test for these categories has a strong significant value of .001. The strongest significance was

between “mainstream media” and “liking.” The comments that mentioned “mainstream media” often received a “like” from other users.

A cross-tabulation was run to determine if there was significance between the categories “relationship to sender” and “participation,” but few comments mentioned the specific leader who referred the user to the video and any form of “participation.” Because of this lack of data, a chi-square was not able to be calculated. Because of the small number of comments, this study does not provide evidence that the “relationship to the sender” is a key factor in determining if a viewer passed along this video.

**Figure 14**

Source of Shared Content and Participation					
	Reply to Comment	Posting another video	Liking a comment	Mention sharing	Other
Email	0	0	0	0	0
Blog	0	0	0	0	0
Word of Mouth	0	0	0	0	0
Mainstream Media	2	0	14	1	4
Facebook	1	0	0	5	1
Twitter	0	0	0	0	0
Other	5	0	5	0	0
Total	5	0	19	6	5
Pearson Chi-Square	0.001				
Likelihood Ratio	0.001				

Mainstream media were the source most often mentioned in the “source of shared content” category—in more than 70 percent of these comments—and of those, many mentioned television stations and cable channels. The programs mentioned included *Good Morning America*, *Fox News*, *Fox and Friends*, *CNN* and several local affiliates (FOX 4 KC, KOMO 4 and KARE). Newspapers were also mentioned but not as often and usually not by name. The

Associated Press was mentioned and a small number of users credited international news channels with introducing them to the “I’m Farming and I Know It” video. Yahoo was also mentioned by several users; however, the coders categorized this as “other” because Yahoo is a search engine and not a true part of the mainstream media.

The large number of comments containing references to mainstream media shows that these media are still widely used throughout the world. Traditionally, mainstream media have been considered among the most credible sources for information. In this instance mainstream media may also be considered an “opinion leader,” as well as a credible source, because several of the users said they watched this video because of something they saw on the news.

**Cherubhugs:** Saw this on CNN this a.m. and had to come see the whole video! Love it!

**Chris Rach:** Komo 4 news brought me here. XD

**Elizabeth Hernandez:** You guys came out in my newspaper c:

The chi-square test shows a significant link between comments containing an endorsement by mainstream media and other users “liking” the comment. This connection shows that other users also think highly of these credible sources.

A look at the YouTube analytics also suggests that “opinion leaders” had a large role in driving viewers to this video.



**Figure 15**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRAFFIC SOURCE <span>?</span>	VIEWS ↓	ESTIMATED MINUTES WATCHED	AVERAGE VIEW DURATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: blue;">●</span> Mobile apps and direct traffic (unknown sou... <span>?</span>	3,162,907 (37.8%)	810,671 (25.5%)	2:08
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: orange;">●</span> Embedded player (unknown sources) <span>?</span>	2,393,993 (28.6%)	340,174 (10.7%)	2:18
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: red;">●</span> YouTube search	1,175,791 (14.0%)	972,130 (30.6%)	2:23
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: lightblue;">●</span> External website	743,323 (8.9%)	141,075 (4.4%)	2:02
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: magenta;">●</span> YouTube suggested video <span>?</span>	466,650 (5.6%)	664,684 (20.9%)	2:07
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: purple;">●</span> YouTube – other features	202,884 (2.4%)	71,105 (2.2%)	2:20
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: green;">●</span> Google search	121,141 (1.4%)	71,943 (2.3%)	1:58
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: cyan;">●</span> Homepage feeds and subscriptions <span>?</span>	101,461 (1.2%)	33,453 (1.1%)	2:09
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: blue;">●</span> YouTube channel page	54,515 (0.7%)	58,458 (1.8%)	1:33
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <span style="color: yellow;">●</span> YouTube advertising	3,305 (0.0%)	3,357 (0.1%)	2:20

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Figure 15 shows the traffic sources for “I’m Farming and I Grow It.” These analytics show that the primary way users reached this YouTube video was through mobile applications and direct traffic, which means about 38 percent of the viewers reached the video on YouTube by clicking on a link which took the user directly to the video. The next highest traffic source was an embedded player—when the actual video is placed directly on a page so users can watch the video on that page without having to follow a link to the YouTube site. An embedded source accounted for 28.6 percent of the video’s traffic. The third highest traffic source was through a YouTube search. Figure 16 gives a more detailed look at those YouTube searches.

As the figure shows, the most prominent type of search used the exact title, but almost all searches involved some variation or portion of the video’s title. Thus, users had already heard of the video before coming to YouTube because “Farming and I Grow It” is not a common phrase that thousands of people would randomly type in. This is evidence that users were guided to the video by some type of “opinion leader” who first introduced them to the video.

Greg said he and his brothers did not do much to spread the word about their video other than posting a link on their personal Facebook pages. Within 24 hours, “about everyone in the ag community had shared it,” Greg said and added “The response absolutely blew us away” (Greg Peterson, April 2013). Something happened in those 24 hours to spread the word about this video, and that “something” is believed to be an “opinion leader.”

**Figure 16**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRAFFIC SOURCE	VIEWS ↓	ESTIMATED MINUTES WATCHED	AVERAGE VIEW DURATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i'm farming and i grow it	23,645 (19.5%)	15,445 (21.5%)	2:36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> im farming and i grow it	11,516 (9.5%)	1,376 (1.9%)	2:21
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> farming and i grow it	7,931 (6.5%)	6,217 (8.6%)	2:38
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> m	7,271 (6.0%)	3,355 (4.7%)	0:37
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i'm a farmer and i grow it	3,060 (2.5%)	2,709 (3.8%)	2:36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i'm a farmer and i know it	2,731 (2.3%)	212 (0.3%)	2:41
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> im a farmer and i grow it	2,726 (2.3%)	1,991 (2.8%)	2:31
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> youtube videos	2,512 (2.1%)	459 (0.6%)	1:06
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> farmer and i grow it	1,878 (1.6%)	1,504 (2.1%)	2:37
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> youtube	1,296 (1.1%)	1,239 (1.7%)	1:11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48h7zoq...">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48h7zoq...</a>	1,153 (1.0%)	47 (0.1%)	3:08
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i'm farming and i know it	1,034 (0.9%)	291 (0.4%)	2:37
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> farming and i know it	1,008 (0.8%)	173 (0.2%)	2:47
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> youtube i'm farming and i grow it	983 (0.8%)	633 (0.9%)	2:36
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> farming	861 (0.7%)	925 (1.3%)	1:37
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i farm it and i grow it	788 (0.7%)	1,131 (1.6%)	2:34
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i'm farming and i grow it site:youtube.com	726 (0.6%)	80 (0.1%)	3:05
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i am farming and i grow it	706 (0.6%)	448 (0.6%)	2:35
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> youtube farming and i grow it	701 (0.6%)	537 (0.7%)	2:32
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> im farming and i know it	654 (0.5%)	108 (0.2%)	2:47
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i farm and i grow it	617 (0.5%)	192 (0.3%)	2:29
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i am a farmer and i grow it	521 (0.4%)	777 (1.1%)	2:53
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> you tube i'm farming and i grow it	470 (0.4%)	145 (0.2%)	2:27
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i'm farming and i grow it youtube	440 (0.4%)	65 (0.1%)	2:19
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *i'm farming and i grow it*	406 (0.3%)	10 (0.0%)	2:40

In an interview with the *Salina Journal*, Greg Peterson said he suspected that Senator Pat Roberts may have been the first “opinion leader” who boosted the initial views of the video, possibly sparking the interest of the mainstream media. Roberts embedded the video and posted a link to the video on his Facebook page the day after the Peterson brothers posted the video. Roberts said he became aware of the video when a staff member showed it to him.

“It came at a time when I was becoming the ranking member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. One of my greatest efforts over the last few years is the defense of production Agriculture from unfair attacks in the media and in popular culture. As soon as I saw this video I knew it was right in line with this work and message” (Pat Roberts, April 2013).

According to the Facebook timeline, Senator Roberts’ post was shared 43 times. Those shares were then shared by 20 other people and probably more. Facebook’s privacy settings allow others to see only the activity of users who mark their settings as “public.” Since most Facebook users have secured privacy settings on their pages, the number of “shares” revealed on Senator Roberts’ page reflects only those pages which are public. Access to pages secured as “private” would reveal more shares.

Figure 17 shows the primary sharing sources used in the spread of this video based on YouTube analytics, and 94 percent of the shares came from Facebook, which is equal to 46,419 shares.

**Figure 17**

SHARING SERVICE	SHARES ↓	% OF TOTAL SHARES
Facebook	46,419	94.0%
Twitter	1,742	3.5%
Google+	863	1.7%
Blogger	76	0.2%
tumblr.	71	0.1%
ВКонтакте	69	0.1%
Email	62	0.1%
orkut	18	0.0%
Hyves	16	0.0%
Linkedin	9	0.0%
Одноклассники	8	0.0%
StumbleUpon	5	0.0%
Myspace	4	0.0%
Tuenti	3	0.0%
hi5	3	0.0%
nk.pl	3	0.0%
Ameba	3	0.0%
Mixx	2	0.0%
LiveJournal	2	0.0%
reddit	1	0.0%

As Greg pointed out in his interview, the video had reached just about everyone in the agriculture community within 24 hours. What happened within those 24 hours is not a clear picture. The Peterson Brothers posted the video on their personal Facebook sites and Senator Roberts was shown the video by a staff member. While it is unclear how the staff member noticed the video, the researcher suggests the staffer might have been a “friend” or had mutual “friends” with one of the Peterson brothers on Facebook. Senator Roberts shared the video sparking the number of viewers on “I’m Farming and I Grow It” and also grabbing the attention of mainstream media. Once media outlets endorsed the brothers and their video, more viewership resulted.

The data do not provide a detailed picture of what happened in the first 24 hours, but certain inferences can be made based on the data available. First, the Peterson brothers posted the

video on their personal Facebook pages. Then it was shared by Senator Pat Roberts, whose Facebook page has more than 4,000 subscribers—those who “like” his page are referred to as subscribers rather than “friends” since his page is an official government page.. Based on these numbers, it is suggested that Senator Pat Roberts became the “opinion leader” endorsing this video and driving thousands of viewers to the site.

In addition, the day after “I’m Farming and I Grow It” was posted, the Peterson Brothers created a Facebook musician/band fan page, with the same subscription name as their YouTube video. The brothers embedded the video and posted a link to their video on this Facebook page and the post was “shared” 1,406 times. As the YouTube views steadily rose, the mainstream media became aware of this video and endorsed it on both national media outlets and local television channels. All the analytics suggest these credible sources and the “opinion leader” are what drove traffic to the video. The main source of traffic came from a direct link followed by embedded video. Senator Roberts post featured both of these traffic sources. Facebook was also the form of social media with an overwhelming majority of the “shares” and Senator Roberts posted his endorsement on Facebook. These analytics also support the assumption that mainstream media acted as a secondary “opinion leader.” Searching YouTube for the video was the third highest form of traffic to this video, and Figure 16 shows that most of those searches involved some version of the song’s title. In addition, many users mentioned the media that drove them to the video in their comments.

The first comment posted on this video was also coded because it was believed this user may also be an “opinion leader” and set the tone for the rest of the comments. This was the first comment:

**Carolyn Jatzlau:** This is great! Thanks for reminding us where our food comes from...Not “the store”, but from real farming families. Thanks for being a farming family.

Based on the factors mentioned in this comment, it appears this user may have set the tone for the following comments. Not only does the user compliment the brothers and express joy, she also references “food creation” and the farming “occupation.” There is a clear mention to “emotion” in this comment and indeed, “emotion” had the highest frequency of mentions in the overall comments. Also, the “occupation” falls under “main actor in video” and that category had the second highest frequency of mentions. While “information” was not a category with one of the highest frequencies, the factor “food creation” was mentioned in almost half of the comments within the “information” category. This data suggests that the first user may have had an influence on the following comments and could be considered an “opinion leader.”

While it may not be crystal clear what happened within the first 24 hours of the video’s posting, this analysis does support the hypothesis that credible sources and “opinion leaders” are major contributors to helping this video to go viral. Based on the significant findings from the cross-tabulation and the YouTube analytics, Hypothesis Three is supported; an endorsement by a credible source or opinion leader will spark the amount of interest in a video and therefore increase the number of views.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

Previous studies concluded the two main gratifications obtained from using media were information and entertainment. Based on the results of this research, the main gratifications for users watching “I’m Farming and I Grow It” are entertainment, primarily entertainment that makes them feel happy. Emotion was the category with the highest frequency, making it the most important influence for users. While previous research (Berger & Milkman, 2012, Lin, et. al, 2006) found mixed results in regards to the type of emotion and amount of sharing evoked, this study concludes that for this video, only positive emotions acted as a catalyst for participation.

Other research suggested that YouTube comments, or online comments in general, usually had a negative tone associated with them. This study proves otherwise. The overwhelming majority of comments not only mentioned emotion, but a positive emotion such as “joy,” “humor” or “compliments.” When users did post negative comments about the video or farming in general, other viewers responded positively to the Peterson brothers and negatively to the commentator. As noted in the frequency section, a trend started within the comments about users remarking on the number of dislikes, thus showing their disapproval for those who “disliked” this video. An interesting note is that YouTube removes comments with too many negative votes and there were several comments removed for this reason. The YouTube policy guidelines are unclear about how many “dislikes” it takes for a comment to be removed. One of the comments coded was actually removed shortly after coding. This is that comment:

**Gandalf Dagre:** yes you are right the stupid rednecks should die in a fire...LOL

Enough users “disliked” this comment resulting in its removal indicating the viewers of “I’m Farming and I Grow It” were overall in support of the video’s message.

English, Sweetser & Ancu (2011) found that source credibility is the appeal that has the highest influence on the credibility of a YouTube political video. Much like that study, this case study found that source credibility and “opinion leaders” are two of the most important influences in driving viewers to a video. While earlier research indicated that influence comes from how well a user knows the person recommending a video, this research found no significance of such “tie strength” as hardly any comments fell into this category.

Burgess (2008) and Lange (2007) argue that participation and social interaction are key factors that drive YouTube hits. While social interaction was not specifically studied in this research, it is clear that users like to interact with one another. “Participation,” defined in this study as any form of sharing or promoting the video content, was one of the categories with the highest frequencies; 27 percent of users either “liked” comments or mentioned sharing the video with someone else. Users also attempted to interact with the Peterson brothers in their comments by relating to them or asking them questions. Many of these are comments similar to the examples in the “main actor in video” category, with users either mentioning where they are from, their similarities of “farming lifestyle,” or even mentioning they know the brothers like the example below:

**Sage Koelling:** my grandpa has them help on his farm when my mom showed me this I did remember seeing them one summer



In addition to this perceived connection to the video creators, users also defended the video and its creators as explained above. It appears the users felt some sort of kinship or protectiveness toward the Peterson brothers. While social interaction was not a factor considered in this study, it would be an interesting factor to look into further, whether that be the social interaction among commenters or the social interaction perceived between the commenter and the video creator.

Koehler (2012) suggested in her blog the main reasons “I’m Farming and I Grow It” went viral were because of the video’s popular culture connection, its fun aspect, its production quality, the media mix and the fact the boys are real people. This research supports some of those observations. Although popular culture is evident in this video and in the comments, it is not clear if that connection influenced users. What is clear is that entertainment, or the fun aspect, is a large part of this video’s success. Production quality was hard to evaluate, but few users mentioned it, so this aspect does not appear to be a reason people shared the video. Analytics show that a media mix is very important to spreading the word about a video. Both Facebook and mainstream media acted as “opinion leaders,” driving other users to this video. This research also supports the suggestion that the “real people” in the video were a reason it went viral, although in this case “setting” and “occupation” were the factors users mentioned more than the actual people in the video.

It was not expected that “main actor in video” would be mentioned so often in the comments. It was mentioned in 31 percent of the sample size, with the predominant factors being “setting” and “occupation.” This indicates that “ordinary people” and user-generated content might have a large appeal to the public. The users seemed to relate to the location of the video, whether that is because it was in a rural location, or because of the connection to Kansas. In

addition, almost 37 percent of the users commented on the “occupation” of farming, whether that be praising the farmers for their work or mentioning that they were also farmers. The high frequency of this category indicates this relationship to the creator may be much more significant than the “entertainment” or “information” gained from the video because “main actor in video” had about ten percentage points more views than either of these categories.

Angwin (2009) also suggested a recipe for a viral video, stating a video needs great content, a fan base and search engine optimization. This case study shows that the content was a major factor in comments with most users noting how happy the content made them feel. Building a fan base is important, but in this case it appears the fan base was driven by “opinion leaders” and credible sources. When these “opinion leaders” are involved, search engine optimization is not a vital factor. The analytics from the farming video show most traffic came from direct links, sharing the video on social media and users searching for the specific title on YouTube.

Previous research and the results of this study show that in order to achieve a viral video, an “opinion leader” has to alert users that the video is out there. This study indicates Facebook is currently the most useful source for sharing a link or embedding the video. Once users click on the link or watch the embedded video, that video must contain content that is creative and unexpected and leaves the user feeling happy, amused or wishing to praise the creators. These positive emotions arouse the user to share the video so other users can share the same emotion.

This research indicates an “opinion leader” is very important to establishing a viral video. Previous research also indicates “opinion leader” significance, as in the example of Justin Bieber, a teenage musician whose user-generated YouTube videos were discovered by Scooter Braun, who is now his manager. With Braun’s help, Bieber has become a pop singer known

worldwide and his professional music video “Baby” is the second highest viewed video to date on YouTube. Braun could be considered an “opinion leader” because he spotted Bieber’s talent first and then began to share it with the world. More research should be conducted investigating “opinion leaders” because it is suspected that most viral videos will have been influenced by some form of “opinion leader.”

What is also interesting about the “opinion leader” in this study is that Senator Roberts may have had an influence on the age demographic of viewers. As stated previously, YouTube analytics show the majority of viewers were in the 45-64 age range. The researcher suspects this may be because Senator Roberts has an older Facebook audience, although due to Facebook privacy settings, the demographic data for most of his audience cannot be clearly distinguished. Also, Senator Roberts is the “top Republican on the Senate Ag Committee in defense of production Agriculture” (Pat Roberts, April 2013). This position may be the reason the video accumulated views so quickly and received so many positive comments. Most likely, Senator Roberts “fans” are also in support of agriculture and probably have some type of connection to the occupation, whether that be currently owning a farm or growing up on one. Because of this positive connection to agriculture, these “fans” may have wanted to share the fun, positive message with as many people as they could.

While age was not specifically studied in this research, it was believed that most viewers would be young adults because YouTube is typically considered a medium that appeals to a younger audience. However, the demographics provided in YouTube analytics show that users may be from all ages and a certain age range does not necessarily determine what makes a viral video. Thus, a video could go viral among any age range, as long as the content or actors appeal to that demographic.

Another important component to this research was the memetic video identification, a type of video that is currently popular among the YouTube viewers. Memes may spread differently than traditional videos. Black (2007) suggested memes spread through sharing as opposed to searching. This study supports his findings. YouTube analytics show that the two main primary traffic sources—accounting for more than 65 percent of the overall traffic sources—were through forms of sharing. These forms were direct links and embedded video. This suggests that memes are something users share with each other and, based on the positive emotion associated with the “I’m Farming and I Grow It” video, it is suspected that memetic videos like this one are shared because they make users laugh and feel joy.

### ***Parody Comparison***

“I’m Farming and I Grow It” was chosen for this case study because one of the creators goes to Kansas State University and this fact made interviews and gaining analytical data much easier. However, this parody is not the only one of “I’m Sexy and I Know It” and it is not the parody with the highest number of views. At least two other parodies based on “I’m Sexy and I Know It” were discovered through this research. One was “I’m Elmo and I Know It,” a video with almost 18 million views and mentioned briefly in the method’s section. This video was posted in January of 2012, roughly five months before the Peterson brothers’. The other video is called “From Sussex and I Know It.” Created by two boys around the same age as the Peterson brothers and also a rap about farming, with many of the scenes taken on a farm, this parody was posted about a month before “I’m Farming and I Grow It.” As of April 2013, this video has only about 622,000 views. So what is the difference among these three videos?

The main factor seems to be the “opinion leader” or credible source aspect. “I’m Elmo and I Know It” originally aired on Sesame Street, a children’s television show with a large

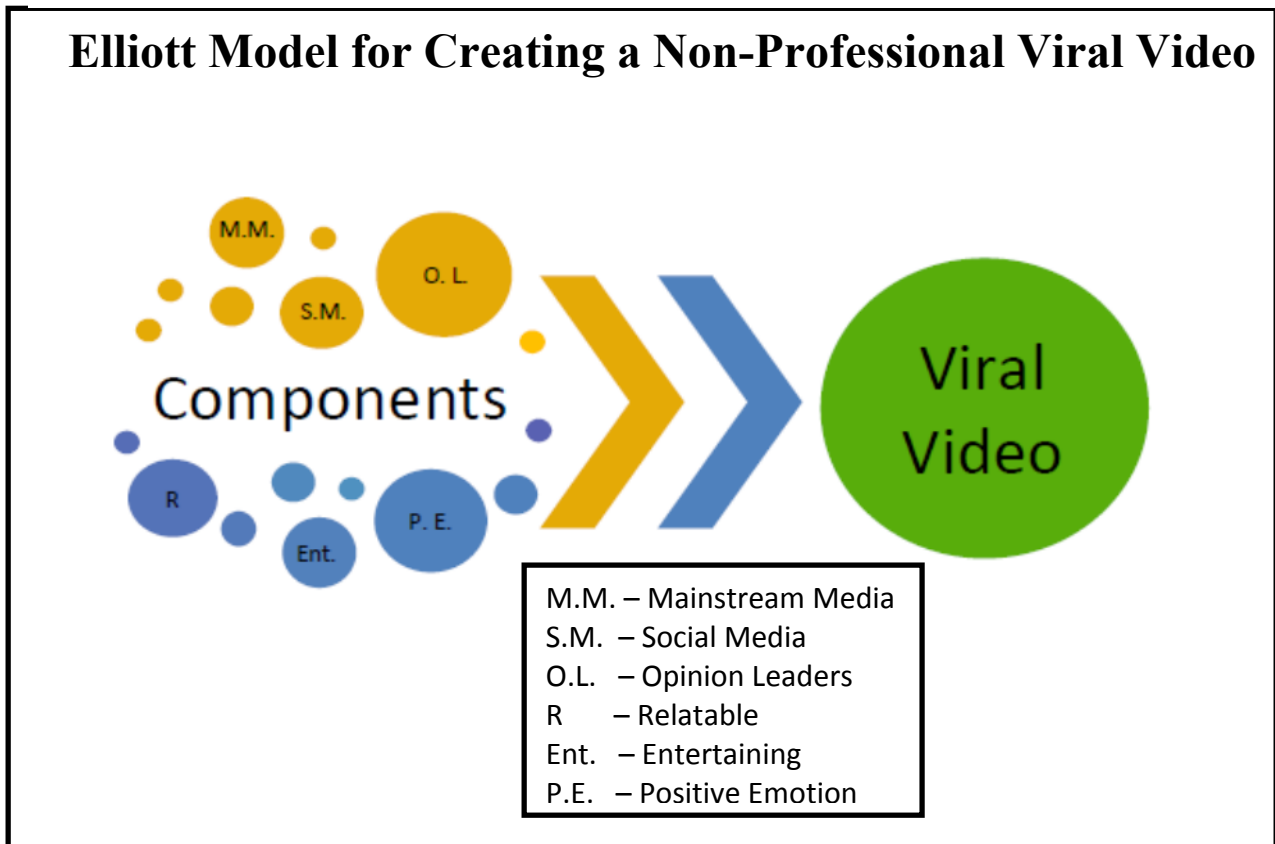
audience. The television show became the credible source for this video. In the case of “I’m Farming and I Grow It,” Senator Pat Roberts was the “opinion leader” who shared the message with the 4,417 people who “like” his page. While “From Sussex and I Know It” has not been researched, it is suspected that they lacked an “opinion leader.” Without anyone sharing this video, it falls in with the other billions of videos already on YouTube.

One other factor appears to separate the first two videos from the one about Sussex: cute animals. While this factor was not evaluated in this case study, “animals” were mentioned in numerous comments, but they fell into the “other” category. Many users watching “I’m Farming and I Grow It” commented on the cute kitten drinking milk and the funny expressions on the cows’ faces as they watched the boys dance. Greg Peterson even suspects using the farm animals is one of the reasons his video went viral (Greg Peterson, April 2013). That is a factor shared by “I’m Elmo and I Know It,” a puppet known for being cuddly and ticklish. While “From Sussex and I Know It” did have animals in the video, the visual showed cows being milked and not cute, cuddly animals or animals with funny expressions.

### ***Viral Model***

Using the findings from this study, as well as findings from previous research, a model has been created, outlining the different areas believed to be integral in creating a viral video. This model is in Figure 18.

Figure 18



As Figure 18 shows, two different types of components are needed to create a non-professional viral video, a sharing source—in the yellow dots—and a certain type of content within the video—in the blue dots. Within the yellow dots, there are three different sharing sources: mainstream media, social media and “opinion leaders.” Based on the results of this study, it is believed that a sharing source is essential to creating a viral video, because someone needs to make the audience aware that a video is on YouTube before a large audience will begin viewing that video. The findings from this content analysis and analysis of YouTube demographics reveal that “opinion leaders” play a vital role in deciding video’s viral activity. Also, users indicated they still rely on credible sources for their content, which was found to be primarily mainstream media. A social media site in general is needed to share the video. For this study, YouTube analytics revealed Facebook was the social media site used for almost all of the

sharing of this video, however, future social media sites may become the predominant sharing source.

The blue dots represent the video content and how it makes a user feel; factors that this research show most likely are the reason viewers decide to share the content. The largest blue circle is positive emotion, the factor mentioned most in the users' comments in this study—accounting for 96 percent of all the comments. Previous research indicated a positive emotion led to sharing a video and this research not only supports those findings, but also narrows down the positive emotions. According to this research, it appears that “joy,” “humor” and “compliments” were the main positive emotions that correlated with “participation.” This research also suggests that “entertainment” is an important component to a viral video. In this study, “entertainment” was based on music and lyrics. Those factors had a significant correlation with positive emotion and positive emotion led to “participation.” This study also suggests that a relatable video has a higher likelihood of going viral. The “main actor in video” category was the category mentioned the most, right below emotion. The main factors mentioned in this category were “occupation” and “setting,” with users often relating to being a farmer or being from a rural community. This indicates that users felt connected to the creators and were more inclined to share the video. This connection may have also created that positive emotion, which has been shown in this study to lead to “participation.”

While these two components are believed to play a significant role in deciding if a video goes viral, it is unclear exactly how important each dot is, which is why the sizes vary based on assumption of importance using this study's results. Also, it is believed there are other factors that go into creating a non-professional viral video, which is why there are other dots that have yet to be labeled. These dots are viewed more like ingredients rather than a strict outline, because

it is believed that a video merely needs a combination of components for viewers to enjoy it and pass it along. However, the researcher suggests that an “opinion leader” or credible source must lead viewers to the video, which is why the first arrow is yellow. Once viewers have found the video, they remain watching the video because of its content, symbolized by the blue arrow, and it is that content which provokes the viewer to share the content. These multiple shares then lead to a viral video. In summary, in order for a non-professional video to go viral, an “opinion leader” must make viewers aware of the video. Once viewers reach the video, they must be entertained by its content, resulting in a positive emotion, which then leads to that viewer sharing the video.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

A limitation to this study is that it is a case study, so it is very narrow. As shown by the comparison of the three similar parodies above, even videos with very similar content do not always reach the same audience. So, one viral video about farming may not necessarily share the same factors as other viral videos, which focus on different topics.

As stated in the methods section, this study only coded when a user “liked” a comment, but did not take into account the number of “likes” on that comment because of the difficulty of incorporating this element into coding. However, this might be an area that would provide more detail on important factors in a viral video. In this study, a large number of “likes” on a comment was noted, but it was not evaluated in the study. One example of a comment with the most “likes” is this:

**fancylizard2012:** Thumbs up if you are a farmer!



This comment received 100 “likes.” If taken into account, these “likes” may have given the “main actor in video” a much higher frequency, thus raising its importance even higher among the categories. A cross-tabulation was not run between “main actor in video” and “participation” because this was not included in the hypotheses; however, future research should consider this connection to see if it is significant. Future research could also evaluate user-generated content versus celebrity viral videos. This research shows a high frequency of comments mentioning some aspect of the user that generated this comment, implying that viewers may have liked this video because it is “ordinary” and relatable. This suggests user-generated content may be just as popular as celebrity content. It would be interesting to determine if celebrity videos or user-generated videos are more appealing to viewers.

Finally, a limitation of this research is that the first 24 hours of viewership is not completely accounted for. While this study uses analytics and Facebook posts to determine the number of “shares” and the source of these “shares,” there is no data to identify exactly where the first views came from. Research following the early path of a viral video could be vital in determining how the first 10,000 views are obtained. It is believed that these first 10,000 to 100,000 views may be a key identifier in a video going viral. Also, while data show that mainstream media were an “opinion leader,” it is unclear how mainstream media became aware of the video. Future research should identify how mainstream media chooses the video they decide to endorse and if there are certain criteria for these viral videos.

This study was limited to a model for non-professional videos; however, future research should identify if the factors for going viral vary for non-professional versus professionally-made videos. The Peterson brothers made a video promoting agriculture and did not reference any agriculture entities such as the Kansas Farm Bureau or Monsanto. However, it would be useful to

evaluate if mentioning or promoting these entities would have altered the number of views. The question is whether this promotion would enhance the number of views or deter viewers from watching. It is believed that an endorsement or promotion like this would deter viewers from sharing the video. If that is the case, it poses a challenge to marketers or universities seeking to promote their organization with a viral video because the mere use of their organization's name may hinder viewers from sharing the video.

Future research should also compare the three different parodies found of "I'm Sexy and I Know It" because there are several different possible research topics that could distinguish key differences that lead to a viral video. It is suspected that adorable animals are a dividing factor among these videos, especially since the animals were mentioned so many times in the comments of "I'm Farming and I Grow It." However, the use of animals was not evaluated in this study; therefore it would be useful to have future research on this particular topic.

A brief look at these three videos also suggests there may be another element to viral videos that has not yet been considered and that is the duration of the video's viral capacity. In today's world, it seems that most people have a short attention span and that viewers quickly move from one viral video to the next; however, at the time of this thesis completion "I'm Farming and I Grow It" is still receiving comments and views almost a year after the video was posted. It does not appear that any research has been conducted on the longevity of viral videos so future research in this area may broaden the view of a viral video. Also, the date the viral video was not considered in this research, but it may be an important factor to the video's success. "I'm Farming and I Grow It" was posted only a month after "From Sussex and I Know It." Some users even suggested in their comments that the Peterson brothers "ripped off" the idea from the creators of the Sussex video. While this is not the case because the Peterson brothers

had been creating the video for months before posting the video, it does highlight an interesting aspect to videos that may or may not make a difference to going viral. Future research could evaluate if the time the video was posted, especially in reference to the popularity of the song it is parodying, is a factor in the video becoming viral.

An overall comparison of these three videos could also provide insight on the definition of “viral.” Each of these videos is a parody of the same song, and two have very similar content. Yet, only one of those videos about farming went viral. This raises the question of what is “viral?” A viral video has been defined as a phenomenon of a video becoming highly popular through rapid, user-led distribution via the internet. Typically, a larger number of views on the video means it has a larger viral video presence, but the online viewership numbers might not tell the whole story. Take the “I’m Elmo and I Know It” video for instance. It has millions of views, yet was barely mentioned in any mainstream media or blogs. Perhaps the reason this video has so many views is because young children, fans of Sesame Street, are watching the video multiple times. Do multiple views by one person suggest the video is more viral than a video with fewer views yet reached more than 40 different mainstream media outlets? This classification needs to be further researched and perhaps redefined.

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## **Appendix A - Interview Questions**

### ***Questions for the Peterson brothers***

1. Why did you decide to make “I’m Farming and I Grow It?”
2. How did you spread the word about the video?
3. What did you expect to happen when you posted the video?
4. What are your thoughts on your video going viral?
5. What do you think it is about your video that made it go viral?
6. How do you think your first video affected the number of views your second video received?
7. What would your advice be for other people who want to make a viral video?

### ***Responses***

1. I’m an Ag Communications major at K-State and wanted to do something to promote agriculture more than it already was. I had made several videos on our YouTube channel, but had the idea for a parody music video when I heard “Sexy and I Know It” and changed the words to what they are now.

2. We didn’t do much of the spreading. We posted in on all of our personal Facebook pages as well as Twitter. I had told a few people we were working on it, but hardly anyone knew it was coming. About everyone in the ag community had shared it within 24 hours and the response absolutely blew us away. With Farmer Style, we did a lot more promotion ourselves, hyping up the video on our 45,000 fan Facebook page. So it was a little different.

3. We had joked when filming about “going viral” but the highest number we ever talked about was 100,000 over a few months. 5 million in a little over a week was definitely a huge surprise.

4. It is definitely a crazy experience to be part of something like that. It can be very exciting and overwhelming at the same time. Social media is very, very powerful and can be used to do crazy things. I’m just glad we went viral for a positive thing and not a negative one (aka Rebecca Black).

5. I think it appealed to just about everyone. There was humor, catchy music, funny lyrics, cute baby animals, 3 brothers, a hardworking family, epic camera shots that we are not sure how we got, and above all I think a lot of people in this country are still connected to the farm in some way so this video connected with them as well.

6. Like I said earlier, our facebook page was a nice audience to have at the beginning. Farmer Style went viral much faster. People were anticipating it and were ready to watch it.

7. Work hard to make your video worth watching. In other words, fine tune it and make it look good. Also, just try to be creative and appeal to some of the things I mentioned earlier. However, if you try too hard it may not work. Sometimes you kind of have to stumble upon going viral.

### ***Questions for Senator Pat Roberts***

1. How did you find out about the "I'm Farming and I Grow It" video?
2. Why did you decide to share the video on your Facebook site?
3. What kind of responses did you receive from others who watched the video after you recommended it?

### ***Responses***

1. In my case, staff showed it to me. It came at a time when I was becoming the ranking member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. One of my greatest efforts over the last few years is the defense of production Agriculture from unfair attacks in the media and in popular culture. As soon as I saw this video I knew it was right in line with this work and message.

2. This video had everything, it was clever, featured my alma mater (if only on t-shirts) and was a great representation of youth, agriculture and Kansas. As I said before, it was right in line with the work I was doing as the top Republican on the Senate Ag Committee in defense of production Agriculture, plus, it was funny.

3. That video went everywhere -- first in Kansas media and then I would see the brothers on "Fox and Friends" in studio in New York. Everyone thought it was hilarious, and enjoyed the passion those young men have for the Kansas way of life and the hard work their family does every day.

## Appendix B - Coding Sheet

Coding Sheet

FACTORS ENTICING VIEWERS TO WATCH "I'M FARMING AND I GROW IT" BASED ON YOUTUBE COMMENTS

ID \_\_\_\_\_

---

Emotional Reaction

- (1) Joy
- (2) Anger
- (3) Disappointment
- (4) Surprise
- (5) Funny
- (6) Complimentary

---

Entertainment

- (1) Music
- (2) Lyrics
- (3) Humor
- (4) Parody
- (5) Popular Culture

---

Information

- (1) Farming Basics
- (2) Farming Lifestyle
- (3) Farming Equipment
- (4) Food Creation
- (5) Farming is Fun

---

Main Actor in Video

- (1) Age
- (2) Attractiveness
- (3) Physique
- (4) Authority on topic
- (5) Ordinary
- (6) Setting
- (7) Voice Quality

\_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to Sender

- (1) Relative
- (2) Friend
- (3) Farm Organization
- (4) Other

\_\_\_\_\_ Source of Shared Content

- (1) Email
- (2) Blog
- (3) Word of Mouth
- (4) Mainstream Media
- (5) Facebook
- (6) Twitter
- (7) Other

\_\_\_\_\_ Video Quality

- (1) Professional
- (2) Semi-professional
- (3) Amateur
- (4) Poor

\_\_\_\_\_ Participation

- (1) Posting Another Video
- (2) Liking a Comment
- (3) Mention Sharing
- (4) Other

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

## Appendix C - "I'm Elmo and I Know it" Lyrics

Everybody, come see what I did. Elmo wrote his own song. What's the title?  
"Elmo's Song."  
Man clever title.  
Everybody want to hear it? Sure. Okay.

When you walk on by, you might see me this little, red guy.  
I skip to the feet. Walking down the street can't see my feet, yeah.  
This is how I roll. Red, fluffy furs getting out of control.  
It's Elmo with the big ol nose. I'm so sweet I don't wear clothes. Yo!

Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Uh-huh I make art

Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Uh-huh I make art

When I walk in Elmo's room. This is what I see.  
Yo! Drawer and Mr. Noodle are staring at me.  
I got Dorothy in a tank and I ain't afraid to show it, show it, show it.  
I'm Elmo and I know it  
I'm Elmo and I know it

When I'm at the vet, Gina needs my help with cleaning pets.  
My hair is curled. I talk to babies in Elmo's world.  
This is how I roll, come on Zoe it's time to roll.  
We head to the store so don't be nervous, no shoes, no shirt and I still get service Wha?

Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Uh-huh I make art

Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Uh-huh I make art

When I walk in Elmo's room. This is what I see.  
Yo! Drawer and Mr. Noodle are staring at me.

I got Dorothy in a tank and I ain't afraid to show it, show it, show it.  
I'm Elmo and I know it  
I'm Elmo and I know it

Tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, yeah  
Tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, yeah  
Tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, yeah  
Tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle, yeah, yeah  
I do the tickle, yeah  
I do the tickle, yeah  
COOKIE!  
I'm Elmo and I know it

COOKIE  
COOKIE  
COOKIE  
COOKIE  
COOKIE  
Let's have COOKIE!

Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Uh-huh I make art

Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Kids look at these crayons  
Uh-huh I make art  
I'm Elmo and I know it

## Appendix D - “Farmer Style” Lyrics

Words by: Greg Peterson

Music by: PSY

No copyright infringement of original song "Gangnam Style" by PSY was intended.

Thanks to our younger sister Laura for helping us film!

Lyrics:

We are the Peterson Farm Bros, and we're farming and we grow it

We love agriculture, and we want the world to know it

Farming is a way of life with many different flavors

Being stewards of the gifts God gave us

Out here on the farm,

We're running green John Deere Tractors

Out here on the farm,

We work in many weather factors

Out here on the farm,

We're working hard to raise your food

Out here on the farm. On the family farm.

Agriculture, is so important to me, (and should be to you) HAY!

It feeds the world and will never ever cease to be, We need to eat!

We all need farmers to provide us with our food, food, food, food!

Workin' farmer style.

Farmer Style

Work, work, work, work, working farmer style

Haaaaaaay, for my cattle

Work, work, work, work, working farmer style

Haaaaaaay, from the field

Work, work, work, work

Farmers are working harder than you might imagine

But that is just because we have a job that is our passion

We will work sunup to sundown time and time again

As if working for the Lord and not for men

Out here on the farm

We get away from lights of cities

Out here on the farm

The countryside is nice and pretty

Out here on the farm.



We work together as a family.  
Out here on the farm. On the family farm.  
Agriculture, is so important to me, (and should be to you) HEY!  
It feeds the world and will never ever cease to be, We need to eat!  
We all need farmers to provide us with our food, food, food, food!

Workin' farmer style

Hay, hay, hay, hay  
Is what we feed our cattle  
So they grow big and strong  
And then become the food that keeps us living nice and long.  
Our crops like corn and wheat  
Help make diets complete  
Without the farmers working  
We would all be starving  
You know what I'm saying?

Workin' farmer style

Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey

Hey, thank the farmers!  
Hey, for your food!

## Appendix E - Final Coding Sheet

Coding Sheet

FACTORS ENTICING VIEWERS TO WATCH “I’M FARMING AND I GROW IT” BASED ON YOUTUBE COMMENTS

ID \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Emotional Reaction

- (1) Joy
- (2) Anger
- (3) Disappointment
- (4) Surprise
- (5) Funny/Humor
- (6) Complimentary

\_\_\_\_\_ Entertainment

- (1) Music
- (2) Lyrics
- (3) Parody
- (4) Popular Culture

\_\_\_\_\_ Information

- (1) Farming Basics
- (2) Farming Lifestyle
- (3) Farming Equipment
- (4) Food Creation
- (5) Farming is Fun

\_\_\_\_\_ Main Actor in Video

- (1) Age
- (2) Attractiveness
- (3) Physique
- (4) Authority on topic
- (5) Ordinary
- (6) Setting
- (7) Voice Quality

\_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to Sender

- (1) Relative
- (2) Friend
- (3) Agriculture Authority
- (4) Other

---

Source of Shared Content

- (1) Email
- (2) Blog
- (3) Word of Mouth
- (4) Mainstream Media
- (5) Facebook
- (6) Twitter
- (7) Other

---

Video Quality

- (1) Professional
- (2) Semi-professional
- (3) Amateur
- (4) Poor

---

Participation

- (1) Replying to a Comment
- (2) Posting Another Video
- (3) Liking a Comment
- (4) Mention Sharing
- (5) Other

---

Other

## Appendix F - "I'm Farming and I Grow It" Lyrics

Words by: Greg Peterson

Music by: LMFAO

No copyright infringement of original song "I'm Sexy and I Know It" by LMFAO was intended.

Thanks to our younger sister Laura for helping us film!

Lyrics:

When I'm up at seven, the sunrise gives me a glimpse of heaven

I get right to work, a farmer's life can be a little berserk yeah

This is how I roll, I feed the cattle till their stomachs are full

Treat em right, that's my belief,

What's for dinner? I say beef!

Gotta Feed Everybody

Gotta Feed Everybody

Gotta Feed Everybody

(Uh-Huh) I work out (side!)

When I step to the bunk (yeah)

This is what I see (Uh-huh)

All the hungry cattle are staring at me

I got passion for my plants and I ain't afraid to show it show it show it show it

I'm farming and I grow it

When I'm in my tractor, I got more power than an arc reactor

And when I'm in the field, I try to raise crops to maximum yield

This is how I roll, without me the world would be outta control

The hours I work, there is no equal

Gotta feed the mouths of hungry people

Gotta Feed Everybody

Gotta Feed Everybody

Gotta Feed Everybody

(Uh-Huh) I work out (side!)

When I step to the bunk (yeah)

This is what I see (Uh-huh)

All the hungry cattle are staring at me

I got passion for my plants and I ain't afraid to show it show it show it show it

I'm farming and I grow it

Water, water, water, water, water, yeah  
Water, water, water, water, water, yeah  
Water, water, water, water, water, yeah  
Water, water, water, water, yeah, yeah

Cattle need water man,  
Crops need water man,  
We all need water man!  
I'm Farming and I Grow it!

## Appendix F - "I'm Sexy and I Know It" Lyrics

Yeah, yeah

When I walk on by, girls be looking like damn he fly  
I pimp to the beat, walking on the street in my new lafreak, yeah  
This is how I roll, animal print, pants outta control,  
It's Redfoo with the big afro  
And like Bruce Leroy I got the glow

Ah... Girl look at that body [x3]

Ah... I work out

Ah... Girl look at that body [x3]

Ah... I work out

When I walk in the spot (yeah), this is what I see (ok)  
Everybody stops and they staring at me  
I got passion in my pants and I ain't afraid to show it, show it, show it, show it

I'm sexy and I know it [x2]

Yeah

When I'm at the mall, security just can't fight them off  
And when I'm at the beach, I'm in a Speedo trying to tan my cheeks (what)  
This is how I roll, come on ladies it's time to go  
We headed to the bar, baby don't be nervous  
No shoes, no shirt, and I still get serviced (watch)

Ah... Girl look at that body [x3]

Ah... I work out

Ah... Girl look at that body [x3]

I work out

When I walk in the spot (yeah), this is what I see (ok)  
Everybody stops and they staring at me  
I got passion in my pants and I ain't afraid to show it, show it, show it, show it

I'm sexy and I know it [x2]

I'm sexy and I know it...

Check it out [x2]

Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle yeah [x3]

Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle yeah, yeah

Do the wiggle man

I do the wiggle man

Yeah

I'm sexy and I know it

Ah... Girl look at that body [x3]

Ah... I work out

Ah... Girl look at that body [x3]

Ah... I work out

Yeah I'm sexy and I know it!