



# Contagious: Why Things Catch On

By Jonah Berger

# Book summary & main ideas

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## Summary:

Contagious: Why Things Catch On by Jonah Berger is a book that explores the science behind why certain products, ideas, and behaviors become popular. It examines six key principles of social transmissionâ€™”social currency, triggers, emotion, public, practical value and storiesâ€™”and how they can be used to create contagious content. The book also provides case studies from various industries to illustrate how these principles have been applied in practice.

The first principle discussed in Contagious is social currency. This refers to the idea that people want to appear knowledgeable or cool when talking about something with

their peers. To make something contagious it needs to give people an opportunity for self-expression or status enhancement. Triggers are another important factor; this means making sure your product or message is top of mind by associating it with existing cues in the environment such as words or images.

Emotion plays a big role in making things catch on because people are more likely to share information if it elicits strong feelings like joy or anger. Public visibility is also important; if something looks popular then others will be more likely to try it out too. Practical value helps too; providing useful information makes people more likely to pass on your message.

Finally, stories help make things memorable and easier for others understand what you're trying to say. By using all six of these principles together

marketers can create content that has greater potential for going viral and reaching larger audiences than ever before.

Main ideas:

**#1. Social Currency: People are more likely to share things that make them look good or make them seem in the know. (People want to be seen as knowledgeable and interesting, so they share things that make them look good to their peers.)**

Social currency is the idea that people are more likely to share things that make them look good or make them seem in the know. People want to be seen as knowledgeable and interesting, so they share things that make them look good to their peers. This could include sharing stories about a new product launch, an upcoming event, or even a funny meme.

By doing this, they can show off their knowledge and gain social status among their friends.

This concept of social currency has been used by marketers for years in order to get people talking about their products or services. For example, if a company releases a new product with unique features, it may create buzz around it by offering exclusive access or discounts only available through word-of-mouth referrals from existing customers. This encourages customers to spread the word about the product and increases its visibility.

The idea of social currency also applies outside of marketing contexts; it's often used in everyday conversations between friends and family members as well. When someone shares something interesting with othersâ€”whether it's news about an upcoming movie release or gossip from

workâ€™they are essentially using social currency as a way to increase their own standing within the group.

***#2. Triggers: Things that are top of mind are more likely to be shared. (By making something top of mind, it increases the chances of it being shared because it is more likely to be thought of and discussed.)***

Triggers are an important factor in determining whether something will be shared or not. When something is top of mind, it is more likely to be discussed and thought about, which increases the chances that it will be shared. This can happen through various methods such as repetition, association with other topics or ideas, and even simply being mentioned frequently in conversations. By making sure that a topic or idea is constantly at the forefront of people's minds, it becomes

much easier for them to share it with others.

This concept has been used by many companies and organizations when trying to promote their products or services. For example, they may use advertising campaigns that feature catchy slogans or jingles so that people remember them easily and associate them with the product being promoted. They may also create content around certain topics related to their product so that those topics become top of mind for potential customers.

In addition to using triggers strategically in marketing efforts, individuals can also take advantage of this concept when sharing information on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. By creating posts around certain topics regularly and mentioning those topics often in conversations online, you can make sure

they stay top of mind for your followers so they are more likely to share your content.

**#3. *Emotion: People are more likely to share things that evoke strong emotions. (People are more likely to share things that evoke strong emotions, such as joy, anger, or surprise, because they are more likely to be remembered and discussed.)***

People are more likely to share things that evoke strong emotions because they are more memorable and engaging. When something elicits a powerful emotion, it is easier for people to recall the experience and discuss it with others. For example, if someone reads an article about a heartwarming story of friendship between two animals, they may be more likely to remember the details of the story and share it with their friends than if they read an article about a mundane topic like



taxes.

Strong emotions can also make content more contagious by inspiring action. If someone feels angry or outraged after reading an article, they may feel compelled to take action in some way—such as sharing the article on social media or signing up for a protest—in order to express their feelings. Similarly, when people feel joy or excitement from something they've seen or heard, they often want to spread that feeling by telling others about it.

In short, strong emotions can have a significant impact on how content spreads online. People are drawn towards stories that evoke powerful feelings because these stories tend to be remembered longer and discussed more widely than those without emotional resonance.

**#4. *Public: People are more likely to do things that are visible to others. (People are more likely to do things that are visible to others because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

People are more likely to do things that are visible to others because it is a form of social proof. When people see others doing something, they assume that it must be the right thing to do and follow suit. This phenomenon is known as "social proof" or "herd behavior" and has been studied extensively in psychology. People want to fit in with their peers and feel accepted by them, so when they see someone else doing something, they often feel compelled to do the same.

This idea can also be seen in marketing campaigns where companies use celebrities or influencers to promote their

products. By having these public figures endorse their product, companies know that people will be more likely to buy it because of the perceived approval from those who have already done so.

The concept of visibility also applies beyond just physical objects; ideas can become popular if enough people talk about them publicly. For example, if an individual posts a funny meme on social media and many other users share it with their friends, then this meme could quickly go viral due its increased visibility.

**#5. *Practical Value: People are more likely to share things that are useful. (People are more likely to share things that are useful because it makes them look good and helps others.)***

People are more likely to share things that have practical value because it makes

them look good and helps others. When people share something useful, they appear knowledgeable and helpful, which can increase their social standing. Additionally, when someone shares something that is beneficial to another person or group of people, it can make them feel good about themselves for being able to help out.

Sharing items with practical value also has the potential to spread quickly through word-of-mouth. People who find a product or service particularly useful may be eager to tell their friends and family about it in order to help them out as well. This type of sharing creates an exponential effect where one person's recommendation leads many more people discovering the item.

**#6. *Stories: People are more likely to share things that are told in stories.***

***(People are more likely to share things that are told in stories because it makes them more memorable and engaging.)***

Stories are a powerful tool for getting people to remember and share information. People are more likely to recall and pass on stories than facts or figures because they make the content more engaging, memorable, and relatable. Stories can also help create an emotional connection with the audience, which makes them even more likely to be shared.

When crafting stories that will be shared by others, it is important to focus on creating something that resonates with your target audience. This means understanding their values, interests, and experiences so you can craft a story that speaks directly to them. Additionally, it's important to keep your story concise yet

compelling in order for it to have maximum impact.

**#7. *Aesthetics: People are more likely to share things that are visually appealing. (People are more likely to share things that are visually appealing because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Aesthetics play an important role in why people share things. People are more likely to share something if it looks good and is visually appealing. This could be a photo, video, or even a piece of text that has been formatted nicely with attractive fonts and colors. When something looks good, it makes the person sharing it look good as well. It also encourages others to do the same because they want to appear just as stylish and fashionable.

The aesthetics of what we share can also

influence how our friends perceive us. If someone shares something that is aesthetically pleasing, their friends may think they have great taste or are up-to-date on trends. On the other hand, if someone shares something that isn't visually appealing, their friends may think less of them for not having better judgement.

Therefore, when creating content for people to share online, it's important to make sure it looks its best so that people will be more likely to pass it along. Aesthetics can go a long way in making sure your message gets seen by many.

***#8. Scarcity: People are more likely to share things that are scarce. (People are more likely to share things that are scarce because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Scarcity is a powerful motivator when it comes to sharing. People are more likely to share things that are scarce because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same. When something is rare, people want to be associated with it and show off their access or knowledge of the item. This can lead to an increase in word-of-mouth marketing as people talk about how they got their hands on something exclusive.

In addition, scarcity also creates a sense of urgency which can drive people into action. If someone knows that there's only a limited amount of something available, they may feel compelled to act quickly before they miss out on the opportunity altogether. This could mean buying tickets for an event before they sell out or signing up for a membership while spots are still open.



Finally, scarcity can also create anticipation and excitement around certain products or services. By limiting availability, companies can generate buzz and interest in what they have to offer without having to spend money on advertising campaigns.

***#9. Credibility: People are more likely to share things that are seen as credible. (People are more likely to share things that are seen as credible because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Credibility is an important factor when it comes to why things catch on. People are more likely to share something if they believe it is credible and trustworthy. This could be because the source of the information has a good reputation, or because there is evidence that supports its accuracy. When people share something

that appears credible, it reflects positively on them and encourages others to do the same.

When considering credibility, people also look at how much authority a source has in their field of expertise. If someone shares information from an expert in their field, then this can add weight to what they are saying and make it more believable for those who receive it. Additionally, if multiple sources provide similar information about a topic then this can help build up its credibility as well.

Ultimately, when people share something that appears credible they not only increase its chances of going viral but also enhance their own reputation as being reliable and knowledgeable.

***#10. Authority: People are more likely to share things that come from a***

***trusted source. (People are more likely to share things that come from a trusted source because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

People are more likely to share things that come from a trusted source because it gives them social credibility. When someone shares something from an authoritative source, it shows that they have good judgement and can be trusted with their opinions. This encourages others to follow suit and share the same content, creating a ripple effect of sharing.

Additionally, people want to appear knowledgeable and in-the-know when it comes to current events or popular topics. Sharing information from a reliable source is one way for them to demonstrate this knowledge without having to do any research themselves. It also helps build

trust between the person who shared the content and those who view it.

Finally, people are more likely to believe what they read if it comes from an authoritative figure or institution. By sharing content from these sources, individuals can help spread important messages quickly while ensuring accuracy at the same time.

**#11. Context: People are more likely to share things that are relevant to their current situation. (People are more likely to share things that are relevant to their current situation because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)**

People are more likely to share things that are relevant to their current situation because it helps them feel connected and part of a larger community. It also gives

them the opportunity to show off their knowledge or expertise, which can be an ego boost. Additionally, when people share something that is relevant to their current situation, they may receive positive feedback from others in the form of likes, comments, or shares. This reinforces the idea that sharing is beneficial and encourages others to do the same.

Sharing content that is relevant to ones current situation also allows for meaningful conversations with friends and family members who have similar interests or experiences. For example, if someone has recently gone through a difficult experience such as a divorce or job loss, they may find comfort in reading stories about other people who have been through similar situations. Sharing these stories can help create connections between individuals who might not otherwise interact.

Finally, sharing content that is relevant to ones current situation can help spread awareness about important issues and causes. By doing so, people can make sure their voices are heard on topics they care deeply about while simultaneously helping educate those around them.

***#12. Incentives: People are more likely to share things if they are rewarded for doing so. (People are more likely to share things if they are rewarded for doing so because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Incentives are a powerful tool for encouraging people to share things. People are more likely to share something if they know that there is some kind of reward or recognition associated with it. This could be anything from a free gift, to

public recognition, or even just the feeling of being part of something bigger than themselves. By offering incentives, companies can create an environment where sharing is encouraged and rewarded.

The rewards don't have to be huge either; small gestures like discounts on products or services can go a long way in motivating people to spread the word about your brand. Additionally, providing exclusive access or content can also help incentivize people to share your message with their friends and family. Incentivizing sharing not only encourages more engagement but also helps build relationships between customers and brands.

Ultimately, incentives provide an incentive for people to do what you want them to do: spread the word about your product or

service. By rewarding those who take action, you create an environment where everyone benefitsâ€”the customer gets something out of it while you get increased visibility and reach.

**#13. *Framing: People are more likely to share things that are framed in a positive light. (People are more likely to share things that are framed in a positive light because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Framing is an important concept when it comes to understanding why things catch on. People are more likely to share something if it is framed in a positive light because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same. For example, if someone shares a story about how they overcame adversity, people will be more likely to share that story than one



about failure or defeat.

The way we frame stories can also influence how people perceive them. If we present a situation as being difficult but ultimately successful, then people will view the outcome in a much more positive light than if we presented the same situation as being easy but ultimately unsuccessful.

By framing stories in a positive light, we can increase their chances of going viral and reaching larger audiences. This is especially true for content creators who want their work to reach as many people as possible.

***#14. Listen: People are more likely to share things if they feel heard. (People are more likely to share things if they feel heard because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

People are more likely to share things if they feel heard because it gives them a sense of validation and recognition. When someone feels that their opinion is valued, they are more likely to spread the word about something they believe in or find interesting. This can be especially true when it comes to social media, where people often post content as a way of expressing themselves and connecting with others. By listening carefully and responding thoughtfully, we create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions.

Furthermore, feeling heard encourages reciprocity – when someone takes the time to listen to us, we want to do the same for them. We may even go out of our way to help promote what they have shared by liking or commenting on their posts or recommending it to our friends. In

this way, listening creates a cycle of positive reinforcement that helps make certain topics or products "go viral".

***#15. Network Effects: People are more likely to share things if their friends are doing so. (People are more likely to share things if their friends are doing so because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Network effects are a powerful force in the world of marketing and social media. When people see that their friends are sharing something, they're more likely to do so as well. This is because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same. People want to be part of the "in crowd" and if everyone else is doing something, then they don't want to miss out on what could be an exciting experience or opportunity.

This phenomenon can also work in reverse; if someone sees that no one else is sharing something, then they may not feel comfortable doing so either. It's important for marketers to recognize this dynamic when creating campaigns or content that relies on word-of-mouth promotion.

By understanding how network effects influence behavior, companies can create strategies that capitalize on these dynamics and increase their chances of success with viral campaigns.

**#16. Social Proof: People are more likely to share things if they see others doing so. (People are more likely to share things if they see others doing so because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)**

Social proof is a powerful tool in marketing and advertising. It's the idea that people are more likely to do something if they see others doing it first. This concept has been around for centuries, but it has become increasingly important in today's digital world where information can spread quickly and easily.

When someone sees their friends or peers sharing something online, they're more likely to share it too. This is because social proof gives them an incentive to join in on the action - after all, nobody wants to be left out of what everyone else is doing! Additionally, when people see others engaging with a product or service, they may feel more confident about trying it themselves.

Social proof also helps build trust between brands and consumers. When potential customers see that other people have had

positive experiences with a company or product, they're much more likely to give it a try themselves. In this way, social proof can be used as an effective form of word-of-mouth marketing.

***#17. Weak Ties: People are more likely to share things if they have weak ties to the source. (People are more likely to share things if they have weak ties to the source because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Weak ties are important when it comes to sharing information. Weak ties refer to the connections between people who don't know each other very well, such as acquaintances or distant friends. People with weak ties are more likely to share something because they have less of a personal stake in the outcome and can be seen as more impartial than close friends

or family members. This makes them appear more trustworthy and encourages others to follow their lead.

When someone shares something from a source that has weak ties, it reflects positively on them since they aren't personally invested in the content. It shows that they're open-minded enough to consider different perspectives and willing to take risks by trying out new things. This encourages others around them to do the same, creating an environment where ideas can spread quickly.

In addition, having weak ties allows for greater diversity of opinion which is essential for healthy conversations about controversial topics. When everyone involved knows each other too well, there's a tendency towards groupthink which stifles creativity and prevents meaningful dialogue from taking place.

***#18. Interactivity: People are more likely to share things if they can interact with them. (People are more likely to share things if they can interact with them because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Interactivity is an important factor in why people share things. When people can interact with something, it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same. For example, if someone posts a funny video on social media that allows viewers to comment or like it, they are more likely to share it because of the potential for positive feedback from their peers. Additionally, interactive content often has a higher level of engagement than static content since users have more control over how they experience it.

Interactive experiences also create



opportunities for personalization and customization which can make sharing even more appealing. People love being able to customize their own experiences and when they can do this with shared content, they're much more likely to pass it along. This could be anything from creating personalized memes or GIFs using templates provided by websites or apps, adding captions or comments on videos before sharing them online.

Overall, interactivity is key when trying to get people interested in your content and encouraging them to share it with others. By providing interactive elements such as commenting sections or customizable options within your content you will increase its chances of going viral.

***#19. Repetition: People are more likely to share things if they are exposed to them multiple times.***

***(People are more likely to share things if they are exposed to them multiple times because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Repetition is an important factor when it comes to why things catch on. People are more likely to share something if they have seen it multiple times, as this makes them look good and encourages others to do the same. This phenomenon can be seen in many aspects of life, from fashion trends to viral videos.

When people see something repeatedly, they become familiar with it and start to recognize its value. They may even begin to think that everyone else knows about it too, which gives them a sense of belonging or being part of a group. As such, they are more likely to share the item with their friends and family in order for them all to experience the same thing.

In addition, repetition also helps build trust between people who have shared experiences. When someone sees something multiple times from different sources or perspectives, they come away feeling like there must be some truth behind what is being said or shown. This further increases their likelihood of sharing the item with others.

***#20. Virality: People are more likely to share things if they have the potential to go viral. (People are more likely to share things if they have the potential to go viral because it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same.)***

Virality is a phenomenon that has become increasingly important in the digital age. People are more likely to share things if they have the potential to go viral because

it makes them look good and encourages others to do the same. When something goes viral, it means that people are talking about it and sharing it with their friends, family, and colleagues. This can lead to increased exposure for whatever is being shared, which can be beneficial for businesses or organizations looking to spread awareness of their product or message.

In his book *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, Jonah Berger explains how certain elements make content more likely to go viral. He identifies six key principles – “social currency, triggers, emotion, public visibility, practical value and stories” – as essential components of successful virality campaigns. By understanding these principles and applying them strategically when creating content for online platforms such as social media sites or blogs, marketers can increase their chances of

achieving success with a campaign.

Ultimately virality is an unpredictable phenomenon but by understanding what makes content contagious one can increase its chances of going viral. With careful planning and execution based on Berger's principles one may be able to create something truly remarkable that will capture people's attention and encourage them to share it with others.

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