

STEPS & LIFT

Why some content spreads and most disappears — the psychology behind virality and conversion

LESSON GOAL

By the end of this module, you will understand the six psychological drivers that make content spread (STEPS), the seven factors that determine whether attention converts to action (LIFT), and how to combine both frameworks to create content that both travels and converts.

WHY CONTENT SPREADS

STEPS FRAMEWORK

SOCIAL CURRENCY

EMOTION & STORIES

LIFT MODEL

S

Social Currency

"Sharing this makes me look good"

T

Triggers

"Top of mind, tip of tongue"

E

Emotion

"When I care, I share"

P

Public

"Built to show, built to grow"

P

Practical Value

"Useful things get shared"

S

Stories

"Ideas travel inside narratives"

Virality is rarely **random**.

People share content because it gives them **social, emotional, or practical value**.

Jonah Berger, Contagious — Why Things Catch On

The Two-Framework Approach: STEPS explains why content spreads. LIFT explains why attention converts. Most content strategies only think about one. The strongest content is designed for both — it travels to new audiences AND guides them toward action.

Why Content Spreads — Social Currency, Triggers & Emotion

The first three psychological drivers behind shareable content

Every day, millions of pieces of content are uploaded. Most disappear instantly. A tiny fraction gets shared, screenshotted, discussed, and remembered. Virality is not luck. **People share content because it gives them emotional, social, or practical value — not because brands ask them to.**

S

Social Currency

"Sharing this makes me look good."

WHY IT WORKS

People care deeply about how others perceive them. Sharing content that makes them appear intelligent, informed, or culturally aware is a form of self-expression and identity management.

EXAMPLES + PLATFORM NUANCE

Exclusive tips, insider knowledge, impressive hacks, hidden gems. LinkedIn rewards expertise. Instagram rewards aesthetics and lifestyle. TikTok rewards humour and cultural relevance.

T

Triggers

"The easier something is to remember, the easier it is to spread."

WHY IT WORKS

Top-of-mind content spreads more. The best brands link themselves to everyday moments, routines, seasons, or cultural events so they are recalled without effort.

EXAMPLE

Spotify Wrapped turns December into a cultural sharing moment. Every year millions share their stats because the trigger (year-end reflection) is powerful and perfectly timed.

E

Emotion

"When I care, I share."

WHY IT WORKS

People rarely share content that makes them feel nothing. High-arousal emotions — awe, excitement, inspiration, surprise, even outrage — drive sharing far more than low-arousal states.

THE IMPORTANT NUANCE

Positive emotions create long-term brand value. Negative emotions (especially outrage) can generate fast reach but damage trust permanently. Emotion drives sharing — but meaning determines brand value.

MY NOTES

Public, Practical Value & Stories

The final three drivers — visibility, usefulness, and the oldest human communication technology

P Public

"Built to show, built to grow."

WHY IT WORKS

Behaviour is heavily influenced by social visibility. The more publicly something is used and seen, the more it becomes socially acceptable, desirable, and eventually culturally normal.

EXAMPLES

AirPods as a status symbol. Stanley Cup as a lifestyle signal. Movember as a visible social movement. Instagrammable experiences designed to be photographed and shared. Visibility creates imitation — repetition creates familiarity.

P Practical Value

"Useful things get shared."

WHY IT WORKS

People love sharing things that help others. Shortcuts, solutions, tips, templates, and tools carry real value — and sharing them is a way of being generous, trusted, and helpful in the eyes of one's network.

EXAMPLES

"How to negotiate your salary." "5 hidden iPhone features." Checklists, calculators, and step-by-step guides. Useful content reduces uncertainty — and uncertainty is psychologically expensive for the audience.

S Stories

"Ideas travel inside narratives."

WHY IT WORKS

Humans are wired for narrative. Stories with characters, conflict, transformation, and emotion are remembered far longer than facts, lists, or statistics. The story is the vessel — the idea travels inside it.

EXAMPLE

Nike rarely sells shoes directly. They sell stories of perseverance, ambition, and personal triumph. The customer sees themselves in the story — and the brand becomes part of their own identity narrative.

THE STEPPS PRINCIPLE

You don't need all six elements in every piece of content. But the more STEPPS elements a piece of content intentionally activates, the more shareable it becomes. Most viral content hits at least three simultaneously.



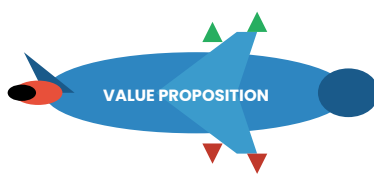


Platform Matching: Each platform rewards different STEPPS drivers. TikTok rewards Emotion and Public most. LinkedIn rewards Social Currency and Practical Value. YouTube rewards Stories and Practical Value. Design each piece for the platform's native psychology — not a universal format.

The LIFT Model

STEPPS gets content shared — LIFT turns attention into action

While STEPPS explains why people share content, the LIFT Model addresses a different but equally important question: once someone arrives at your page, offer, or call to action — what determines whether they act or leave?

LIFT MODEL — Conversion Analysis Framework

<p>Value Proposition</p> <p>The most important factor of all. The central force that determines whether conversion is even possible. If the value proposition is weak, no other element can compensate.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> Relevance</p> <p>Does the page or content match what the visitor was searching for or expecting? Mismatched relevance kills conversions immediately — the visitor feels they landed in the wrong place.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> Clarity</p> <p>Can the visitor immediately understand the offer? Is the value proposition communicated through images, text, video, and CTA in a way that is instantly clear — with zero interpretation required?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Urgency</p> <div style="background-color: #ffc107; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px 0;"> Creates momentum </div> <p>Why act now? Real deadlines, limited availability, or time-sensitive context that makes waiting feel costly.</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Anxiety</p> <div style="background-color: #ffe0b2; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px 0;"> Reduces lift </div> <p>Fears, doubts, and risks the visitor has about committing. Reviews, guarantees, and trust signals remove anxiety.</p>
<p>How to apply Urgency</p> <p>Genuine deadlines, limited availability, seasonal context. Must be real — false urgency destroys trust and long-term brand value. (See Module 3C.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> Distraction</p> <p>Competing elements that pull the visitor's attention away from the primary goal. Every unnecessary link, banner, pop-up, or secondary CTA reduces conversion probability.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> Anxiety</p> <p>Fears, doubts, and perceived risks. What if it is wrong? What if returning is hard? Trust badges, reviews, and guarantees are anxiety-removal tools — not decorative elements.</p>

Lift Factors (Increase conversion)

Value Proposition + Relevance + Clarity + Urgency

Drag Factors (Reduce conversion)

Anxiety + Distraction → must be actively removed

Key Takeaways

What to remember — and your fillable STEPPS + LIFT Planner is on the next page

STEPPS — WHY CONTENT SPREADS

Social Currency — People share what makes them look good

Triggers — Link your brand to everyday moments and routines

Emotion — High-arousal feelings drive sharing, meaning determines value

Public — Visible behaviour creates social proof and imitation

Practical Value — Useful things spread because sharing helps others

Stories — Narrative is the most ancient and effective transmission method

LIFT — WHY ATTENTION CONVERTS

Value Proposition — The central force. Must be strong before anything else matters.

Relevance — Does the content match what the visitor expected?

Clarity — Is the offer instantly understandable without effort?

Urgency — Real reasons to act now — never manufactured

Anxiety — Must be removed with trust signals, guarantees, and reviews

Distraction — Every competing element reduces conversion probability

MODULE 5B — CORE LESSONS

- * Virality is psychological, not accidental — it can be designed intentionally using STEPPS
- * People share content because of the value it gives them, not because of the brand behind it
- * Different platforms reward different STEPPS drivers — match the psychology to the platform
- * LIFT turns attention into action — focus on removing drag factors (anxiety, distraction) as much as adding lift factors
- * The best content strategy combines both frameworks: content that travels AND converts

Practical Exercise

- 1 Take your 3 most successful pieces of content from the last 6 months
- 2 Analyse each using STEPPS — which elements made them work?
- 3 Design one new piece of content intentionally using at least 3 STEPPS elements
- 4 Audit one landing page or key conversion point using the LIFT model — what needs fixing?

Up Next — Module 5C: Influencer Marketing and Working with Creators. We explore how to choose the right creators, structure partnerships, brief them effectively, and measure results — moving from reach to genuine trust transfer.

PART A -- STEPPS ANALYSIS Does this content activate each driver? Rate strength + add your idea.

S Social Currency

T Triggers

E Emotion

P Public

P Practical Value

S Stories

PART B -- LIFT ANALYSIS What increases conversion. Red = must be removed.

Value Proposition -- how strong is it?

Relevance -- does it match user intent?

Clarity -- is the offer instantly clear?

Urgency -- real reasons to act now?

Anxiety -- fears to remove?

Distraction -- competing elements?

PART C -- CONTENT BRIEF SUMMARY

Core message in one sentence

Primary STEPPS drivers I am activating

Biggest LIFT improvement I need to make

STEPPS gets content shared, turns attention into action.