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# EFFECTIVE COMMON HERO MARKETING AND HOW TO MAKE THEM VIRAL

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## Introduction

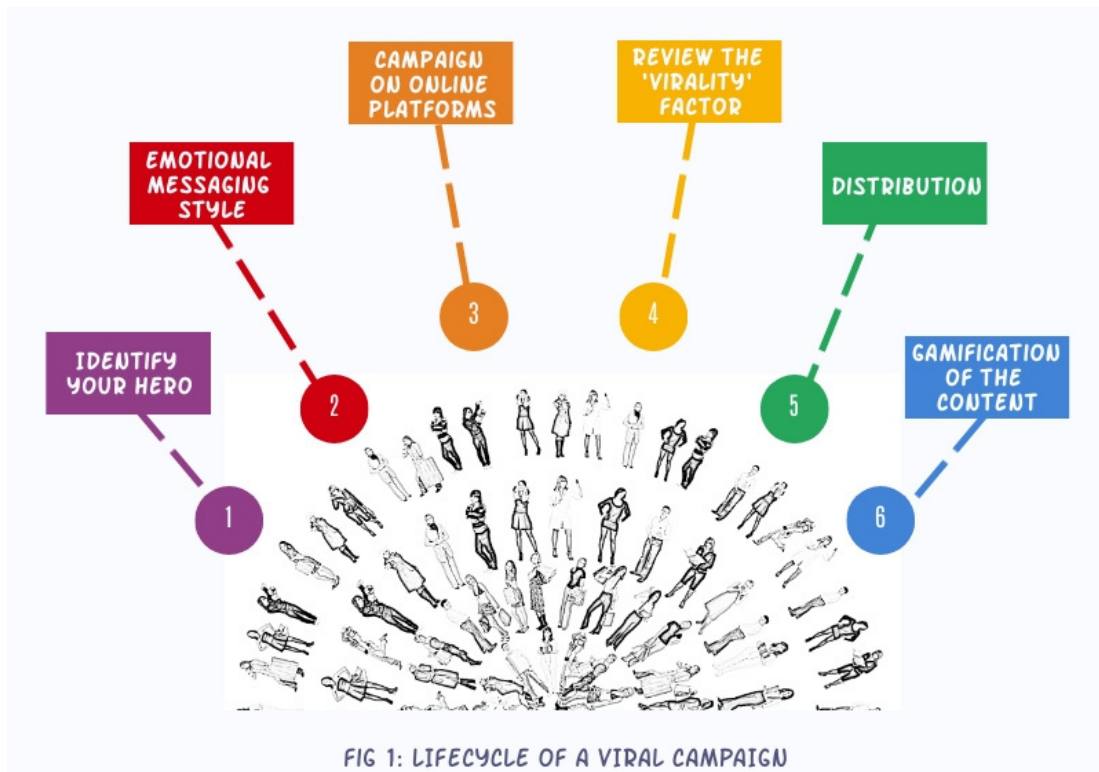
Heroes give people a character to aspire, root for and relate to in a campaign story line. Heroes often possess great qualities, overcome constraints and emerge successful in their work. Brands have realized while 50's something Bollywood actor is good for peddling FOMO, coloured colas and luxury themes it is the ordinary people as the central characters that ring more authentic for many products/services. Common man hero may not possess any heroic abilities or strengths like the 50's something Bollywood actors but their stories as underdogs winning against many odds, and acting selflessly with a strong moral company inspires and connects with consumers across many segments. A great advantage of common hero branding is that it can be used across products and services across different industries. A common hero is more relatable than using celebrities to endorse your product as these are not seen as sell campaigns but as powerful stories of upliftment and purposeful life stories.

Brands like Mahindra, Hero Honda, Maruti, Abbot, P&G Products and Uniliver's Dove are some of the best examples of common hero branding. The brand's product placement is subtle in the narrative, if not, completely in the backseat and it is the common hero's experience that is accentuated. With ease of interactivity and user engagement increasing, many brands realize common hero branding campaigns can be successfully used to involve consumers to watch, relate, create and distribute the campaign to realize high ROI. Successful common hero branding campaigns require "authentic" central characters, powerful storyline that is relatable and inspiring, has multiple emotive hooks on text, visual and music sides and makes it easy for consumers to modify and run the campaigns independently.

### **Common Hero Branding Framework:**

We've identified 6 key elements that make a common hero branding effective and viral. *Figure 1*, broadly states the steps that should be taken to ensure the campaign success.

1. Identifying common heroes
2. Using an emotional messaging style
3. Online mediums to run the campaign
4. Assessing the 'virality' of the content
5. Distribution of the content
6. Gamification of the content



### 1. Identifying common heroes:

Usually they will be change makers within their society and their story is known to the local public but not to a larger audience. Brands can use this and promote their story for a cause. Cultural institutionalization would lead to work done by doctors, engineers, lawyers etc have more authority than work done by the rest. Social hierarchy plays a large role in determining who should be chosen. Common heroes can also be identified among publicly recognized achievers, among users who've discovered a greater purpose in life or even the product users themselves. Another way brands can identify their local heroes is within their organization. Study the users and see what they are up to, especially in remote areas. Social media can be used to analyze the posts that a brand gets tagged in to find if that person did something extra-ordinary.

### 2. Using an emotional messaging style:

It should be a universal narrative that can be easily accepted by anyone. It should inspire both awe and approval from your audience. Addressing emotional appeals like empathy and pain will lead to eliciting a reaction from the audience. When portraying this style of narrative, you're addressing a pain-point existing in society and showing how a regular person has made a difference and how the viewer too can be inspired to do the same.

### 3. Online mediums to run the campaign:

Including inspirational content in your social media strategy is a great way to get people to interact with your marketing. A higher social media engagement is seen when people receive personalized content to their liking. (Emotionally charged stories of real life heroes can move the audience to take action much better than a direct marketing advertisement asking them to purchase/use the service of X). With Facebook, brands have been using videos with a story to advertise themselves for a while now. Images with captions also perform well on the platform. Instagram on the other hand is a visual medium. Your campaign needs to have an eye-catching image or video, text is not priority here. Twitter is a platform where witty and thought-provoking text plays importance. Usage of Images, GIFs, Memes and videos increases the likelihood of engagement for the tweets. Using hashtags for better reach is common for all three platforms. Even short form content does well these days. TikTok is an example of this, the medium gathered a large traction because of its simplistic approach. They express themselves in 60s or less. It forces people to keep the message simple and to-the-point and thus effective. Take advantage of this when picking where to showcase the content. When using these platforms, don't complicate the message. The message should be easily understood by the viewer and they should be able to follow along to take it to the next step. Keep it short, people lose interest if the process is too long.



### 4. Assessing the 'virality' of the content:

The campaign should have an attractive design. Then only will it gather interest as well as promote engagement from the public. Invoking altruism is a common cause for why people get persuaded and why many willingly jump onto the social issue bandwagon. Going along with the norm is another reason people get persuaded. The more the challenge is taken up by others, the more the ratio of the content getting shared. There is no sure fire way of ensuring the viral-ness of it, so it's a necessary step to do a test run before going live with your campaign. Conduct an A/B testing and see which content performs better. An SEO A/B testing for each element of your campaign - the title, the description, the image, the soundtracks etc.





### **5. Distribution of the content:**

There are two methods to distribute user generated content - either it can be controlled or democratized. One, the users themselves share and diversify the reach or the brand can curate the stories and then publish it on their own platform. With the former, the users have more autonomy and they have ownership of the content being distributed. In the latter, the users don't have to worry about the final distribution and only have to create the content and it's the brands responsibility to share it.

### **6. Gamification of the content:**

Design an easy to use template that does not require much effort from the viewers. When the content is easy to replicate, there is a higher chance of it being shared. Here they use the pre-made templates and are free to express their creativity and stories in their own way. There is still freedom to express themselves with the content even by standardising the template. Identifying common heroes within their families, leads to appreciation from others. They are free to share their own stories without fearing judgement, the same story is shared by everyone that brings strength in numbers, making it viral. It is a low cost of involvement from the user that leads to a high dopamine effect. Including rewards can prompt consumers to actively participate. For a viral campaign, introduce leaderboards showcasing the top 10 contenders for the campaign based on the number of likes a post has received. There is continuous content creation going back and forth between the brand and the public. The public will also be motivated to actively distribute among their friends and family to showcase their shared content on the leaderboard. Set a deadline for the campaign. The fear of missing out will also be induced as the campaign has an end date and activity will surge during the period. This creates an overall fun and immersive experience for the user who is not only part of the content creation but also the distribution as well.

Marketing alone no longer cuts it for companies. People like to be aligned with groups that are known for being involved with social work activities. Some organizations make use of their CSR activities to show how they're making a difference in the lives of others but it's not an activity that is largely pursued and in the end companies rely on direct marketing methods to engage with customers. By including real life common heroes in your marketing, not only are you connecting with the larger public but you're also aligning your brand with the cause that you are promoting showcasing yourself as a brand who cares beyond its product.

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