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### **Powerful Marketing Unwrapped:**

#### **An Examination of Spotify's Wrapped Campaign & The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge**

Viral marketing campaigns rarely emerge as fully formed successes overnight. Often careful curation and strategic decisions must be made to ensure a campaign becomes successful, and lasting, in consumer's minds. Both Spotify's ongoing Wrapped campaign and 2014's viral ALS Ice Bucket Challenge have achieved notoriety as iconic advertising campaigns because of their lasting impact on viral marketing. Each campaign is a worthy case-study into how social media marketing can drive brand awareness, influence consumer behavior, inspire organic content, and create positive returns on investments.

#### **Spotify Wrapped**

Spotify's Wrapped campaign first debuted in 2017 where it was warmly received by Spotify users and the public. The popular online music streaming service began as a small start-up company in Stockholm, Sweden when co-founders Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon developed the platform to combat music piracy in 2006 ("How Spotify Came", BBC.com). After launching the platform two years later, Spotify quickly grew in popularity as more music and content became available to stream. In 2018 Spotify had 159 million active users in 61 countries who could stream 35 million different songs ("How Spotify Came", BBC.com). Presently, Spotify hosts music, podcasts, and video content that is curated for each user in the form of personalized playlists, custom radio stations, recommended music from friends or celebrities, and cross-platform support for listening on the go ("What is Spotify?", Spotify.com). While the service is available for free, users have the ability upgrade to a premium membership for approximately ten dollars a month which offers perks like ad free listening.

In 2016 Spotify wanted to expand their user base and brand recognition. The company had seen a period of unsustainable growth that had increased the number of users on Spotify but did little to increase brand awareness long term. Spotify's in-house marketing team was tasked with increasing the brand's market share in the online music streaming service market while promoting a user-forward brand identity. The new campaign had to simultaneously resonate with current users while attracting new members to be considered successful.

To fully understand Spotify's Wrapped Campaign, one must first examine its direct predecessor "Thanks, 2016. It's been weird.". According to Business Insider this campaign was the largest Spotify had launched to date and aired in 14 different markets around the world through localized messages that featured regional popular topics from 2016 (Roberts). Spotify's chief marketing officer, Seth Farbman, told Creativity, "There has been some debate about whether big data is muting creativity in marketing, but we have turned that on its head," adding that for Spotify "data inspires and gives an insight into the emotion that people are expressing" (qtd. in Roberts). Spotify purposely promoted user data that gave the impression that Spotify understood what their users wanted. The brand positioned itself as a highly relevant, modern company that leveraged the negative public perception of data collection to instead convince consumers that Spotify collecting data was a positive thing because Spotify created entertainment value for consumers without targeting individual personal data. The use of trends or allusions to pieces of disconnected, generalized data would continue as Spotify's marketing evolved.

From the outset Spotify designed their Wrapped campaign to be equally reflective and foundational. In December of 2017 Spotify renamed their year-in-review style advertising and released the first iteration of the "Wrapped" campaign which presented users with a curated, custom playlist of their most-listened-to artists in addition to metrics like how much time the user listened to music on Spotify that year (Sentance). To encourage organic content Spotify created a series of billboards that

featured obscure facts or jokes based on data that was collected over the previous eleven months. For example, Spotify asked users to create goals for the upcoming year like “Be as loving as the person who put 48 Ed Sheeran songs on their ‘I Love Gingers Playlist’” or “Take a page from the 3,445 people who streamed the ‘Boozy Brunch’ playlist on a Wednesday this year” on separate regional billboards (O’Brien). The two-pronged approach of creating user-facing content such as the personalized year-in-review playlists and humorous billboards encouraged individuals to respond to Spotify on social media by organically posting pictures of the billboards or sharing their playlists on their personal Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages. Spotify’s app downloads skyrocketed, web traffic increased dramatically, and online conversations about Spotify exploded as users raced to the 2017 Wrapped Website to see, and share, their personal playlists.



Figure 1: A billboard from Spotify's 2017 Wrapped Campaign featuring Ed Sheeran on a colorful background (O'Brien).

As December of 2018 approached, the marketing team built on their previous success by expanding the campaign to include more published metrics, humorous billboards, and a new feature that gave premium members the option of submitting their Wrapped results to Spotify for publication. 2018 offered unique challenges to Spotify’s data driven campaign model because consumers had a heightened awareness of data driven advertising following the Cambridge Analytica scandal and unsuccessful attempts at data driven advertising like Netflix’s unintentional shaming of a user who watched *The Christmas Prince* on repeat (Barrett). To preserve user privacy, Spotify continued to limit their publishing to non-personally identifiable data while also providing a path for people who wanted to publicly share their Wrapped results. Spotify



Figure 2: Billboard in London featuring local user's data promoting Spotify Wrapped (“Relive Your Year”, Spotify.com)

developed a multi-step process which allowed specific users to be prominently displayed in iconic advertising locations like Times Square in New York. The move allowed users to participate on multiple levels based on personal comfort while simultaneously providing personalized, regional content for Spotify's marketing team to display to the public.

Spotify successfully maintained positive audience perception and saw sustained growth as more users joined the platform eager to share their Wrapped Playlist in December. To bring something fresh to the 2019 Wrapped campaign Spotify

focused on providing users' metrics "of a decade". In a blog post the 2019 Wrapped team explained that scale significantly impacted how they approached content creation because Spotify had to process "over 10 years' worth of data for all of [their] monthly active users (MAU), of which [Spotify has] over 248 million" (Kalra, Bindia, et al.).

The Marketing team decided to create metrics based around "data stories" that each user created through their data history such as top artists, top songs, and top podcasts. In addition to publishing trends of the decade, Spotify made the Wrapped Campaign more accessible to users by allowing users to view their Wrapped metrics on the 2019 website or the Spotify app for the first time. Sharing

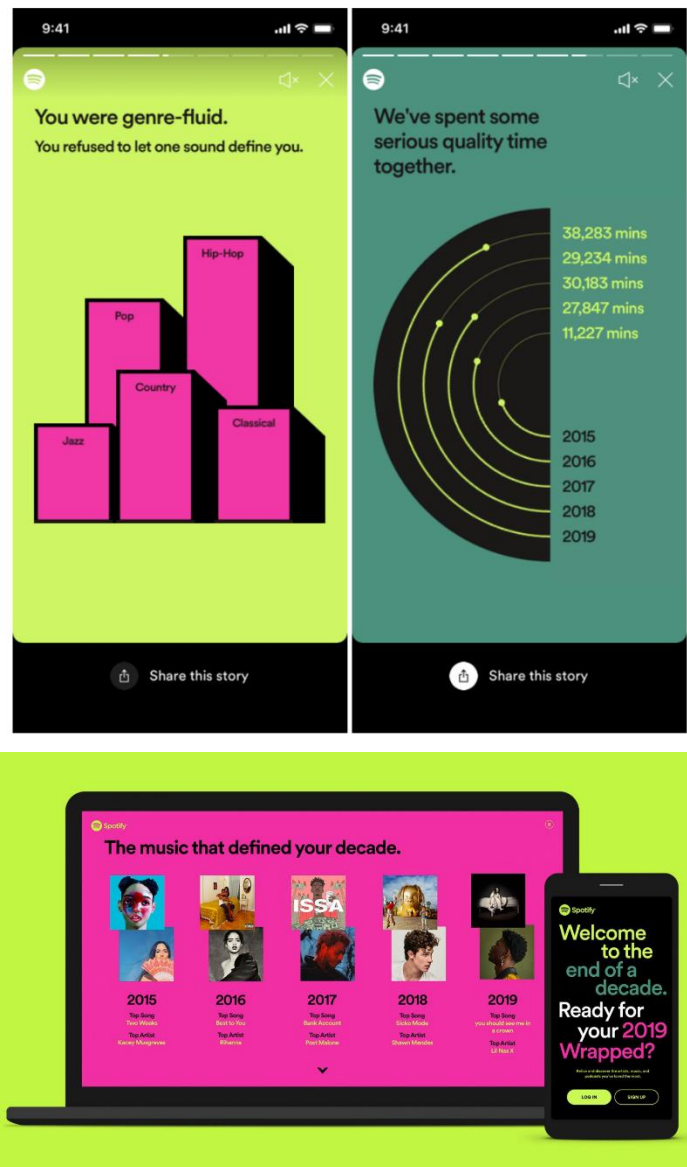


Figure 3: Images from the 2019 Wrapped campaign showing mobile (top) and desktop versions (bottom) of a user's "2019 Wrapped" or "My Decade Wrapped" ("Spotify Wrapped 2019", Spotify.com).

Wrapped results became seamlessly integrated with colorful motion graphics that delighted users and prominently placed “share” buttons. As a result of promoting social sharing Spotify Wrapped trended on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

To further extend the 2019 campaign’s reach Spotify created “Wrapped for Artists” which allowed creators featured on Spotify to see how users interacted with their music, or podcasts, during 2019. This decision led to popular artists posting their Wrapped for Artists results creating a positive feedback loop for both Spotify and creators as fans liked, shared, commented on their favorite artist’s posts. Spotify’s Wrapped campaign was once again a huge hit among fans who enjoyed participating in the campaign, media outlets that further publicized the quirky data insights, and envious Apple Music users who found the Spotify-competitor’s year in review campaigns lacking.

### **The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge**

Many successful traits from Spotify’s Wrapped Campaign can be seen in the preceding 2014 ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, a viral, organic, grassroots campaign designed to promote awareness of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). According to the Mayo Clinic ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease, is a devastating progressive nervous system disease that afflicts nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. Early symptoms start with muscle twitching, weakness, or slurred speech but symptoms eventually escalate to the individual losing control over muscles necessary to move, speak, eat, and breathe (“Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)”, MayoClinic.org). Currently there is not a known cause, or cure, for this fatal disease.

In the beginning the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was simply “The Ice Bucket Challenge” (Sifferlin). To participate in the Ice Bucket Challenge an individual had to be nominated, called out, or tagged, in a video that was posted on a social media channels like YouTube, Facebook, Vine, and Instagram under the hashtag #IceBucketChallenge. Initially the challenge was to encourage charitable donation to the

challenger's charity of choice instead of dumping a bucket of ice water over your head, but overtime it became closely linked with donating to charities focused on ALS. Time Magazine's Alexandra Sifferlin traced the apparent first post linking the Ice Bucket Challenge and donating to ALS research to a July 15<sup>th</sup> video posted by Chris Kennedy, who accepted the Ice Bucket Challenge, and specifically challenged three additional close friends and family members to donate to the ALS Foundation in honor of a relative who was suffering from ALS (Sifferlin). After being called out and seeing Kennedy's post, Jeanette Senerchia accepted the challenge and used the hashtags #takingiceforantsenerchiajr and #StrikeOutALS to honor her husband Anthony who was diagnosed with ALS and support the non-profit they founded aimed at fighting ALS (Sifferlin). As more individuals connected to individuals affected by ALS took the Ice Bucket Challenge the link between the challenge and specifically donating to ALS research instead of any charity became an integral part of the challenge.

At the heart of the Ice Bucket Challenge was a feedback loop where the participant challenged at least three additional people to also undertake the challenge within 24 hours. When the Ice Bucket Challenge reached Pete Frates in Boston, Massachusetts, The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge truly took off. In high school Pete Frates was a three sport all-start who served as team captain for the football and hockey teams (Francis). Frates had a passion for baseball which he pursued at Boston College. In his senior year Frates was team captain of the Boston College baseball team and well loved by hundreds of close friends. When Frates was diagnosed with ALS at age 27, he became determined to make a difference ("ALS Patient",



Figure 4: Pictures of Pete Frates from his days playing baseball at Boston College (right) and after his Diagnosis at age 27 (left) ("History", PeteFrates.com).

PeteFrates.com). Pete Frates had built a wide-reaching network of friends, former teammates, professional athletes, and family that answered his call to take the Ice Bucket Challenge and donate to the ALS research. What started as a small social movement in Boston soon spread across the country as

families, celebrities, professional athletes, CEOs, US Presidents, and entire cities took the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Within 8 short weeks ALS research received over \$220 million dollars, a 400% increase compared to the same time last year, from donors who were influenced by the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge (Francis).

Many factors contributed to this viral social movement's global success. Former Forbes Contributor Steve Olenski highlights that according to Facebook "between June 1 and August 17, over 28 million people have joined the conversation about the Ice Bucket Challenge including posting, commenting or liking a challenge post" and 2.4 million videos related to the challenge were shared on the platform (Olenski). Analysts believe the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge can attribute its success to several critical factors including timing. The challenge became popular in June and peaked during late July and early August, i.e., the "dog-days" of summer. If the challenge instead circulated in February or November people would be less inclined to participate because temperatures are significantly colder and less conducive to people dumping buckets of ice water on themselves. Conducting the challenge during the hottest months of the year encouraged participation because the challenge had a low barrier to entry and offered relief from local heat waves.



*Figure 5: A group of people participate in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge during the summer of 2014 (Olenski).*

In addition to relevant timing The Ice Bucket Challenge was uniquely positioned to go viral because it encouraged healthy competition with a human touch. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge leveraged the power of social networks and the competitive nature of friends to out-do each other. Thousands of ordinary people were able to challenge each other resulting in wide-spread awareness of ALS, promotion of charitable organizations related to ALS treatment or research, and massive donations as countless celebrities and legendary philanthropist Bill Gates became involved.

## Comparisons

Both Spotify's Wrapped Campaign and the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge were widely successful. Each campaign extended their reach by leveraging easily shared content on social media. Interacting with Spotify Wrapped was easy for users because Spotify created a culture of sharing around their personalized playlists that were optimized for users to organically post on their personal social media pages. The Ice Bucket Challenge was similarly well equipped for sharing online because most social media platforms make it easy for users to upload videos and tag other people online. The challenge was shared quickly because its positive feedback loop was extremely efficient. Tagged individuals were immediately notified that their name had been mentioned in a friend's post driving more people to participate than would have without the aid of social media.

There are several notable differences between the two campaigns including duration and scope. Spotify Wrapped is an ongoing, multi-year campaign designed to produce a bigger return on investment for Spotify each year. Spotify continues to increase the reach of their campaign through new features like introducing Wrapped for Artists. In contrast, the Ice Bucket Challenge trended for a moment in time. Though efforts were made to revamp the challenge in following years, the Ice Bucket Challenge failed to find wide-spread participation beyond 2014. Though both campaigns found international audiences only Spotify Wrapped was able to convert their audience's initial excitement into lasting brand loyalty.

Of the two campaigns one can argue that Spotify's Wrapped campaign is far more successful because of its long-term success compared to the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Each campaign was able to dramatically increase brand-awareness and drive conversions, however only Spotify has created a campaign with sticking-power. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was highly relevant during the summer of 2014, however after users stopped participating and the summer heat dissipated the challenge lost its



staying power. Ultimately each campaign will be remembered for its contributions to viral marketing because each campaign brought innovative techniques to viral marketing campaigns.

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