



It's All #HAPPY (Until Someone Dies)!

Miia Halme-Tuomisaari
May, 2014



A month and some ago I shared thoughts on the 'Global Happiness Inc' formed around the [#HAPPY videos created for the tune by Will Pharrell](#). The publication of this post coincided with the UN's International Day of Happiness - with #HAPPY being of course the song that officially commemorated the special day. At the time I fully expected this to form the culmination point for this fascinating and bizarre global phenomenon, and thought that we would soon thereafter witness the inevitable downfall for this undoubted social media 'thing' of Spring 2014.

Yet reality has assumed a more fascinating course as since my original post global #HAPPINESS has steadily increased as #HAPPY videos have continued to



profligate.

In recent weeks we have seen both #HappyIslam & #HappyAfrica, and to date the number of #HAPPY videos surfing the virtual world exceeds 1000; a ridiculous number by any standards and almost incomprehensible too.

Just what is it that motivates people to participate in this phenomenon? Why do people of diverse sizes, shapes, ages and races find the urge to shake their money makers to this undisputedly catchy tune and post the results online? Has there EVER existed a social media phenomenon quite as widely spread, mobilising as high number of people and watched by as many people the world over - by now the #HAPPY videos must jointly have been seen by tens if not hundreds of millions of people likely in all continents of the world.

Irrespective of the answers, a cynic remains uneasy. As I wrote already the first time around, what we are witnessing is undoubtedly the wildest of PR dreams come true. Each time a new #HAPPY video is released, for each 'I get it' uttered by Oprah Winfrey to recognize Will Pharrell's intense emotion as the two recently watched compilations of #HAPPY videos on her show, also the subsequent cash flow grows more voluminous. By now #HAPPY has topped charts the world over, positioning it as a symbolic light house for a music industry that remains in turmoil for reclining record sales and lost revenues.

Thus also the team behind this unique publicity plan has good cause for broadening its grin. I actually doubt that despite of their bold visions, embodied also in the stroke of genius to accompany the tune originally with the world's first 24 hour-long music video, *even the professionals* responsible could have predicted just how #HAPPY the outcome for this particular PR strategy would turn out. As far as new publishing strategies go, #HAPPY certainly has done things and gone to places where few have dared to dream were possible before.

And yet there is also something more. For the videos do entail undoubtedly *something* that is difficult to define and dismiss for even the most hard boiled



sceptic: they do convey a genuine burst of positive emotion. And I admit that it is truly unique and infectious to watch the people in these videos dancing with expressions of pure joy on their faces.

One almost feels as if one catches a glimpse of something genuine and evasive in the world - as if one momentarily gains entrance into the very core of our shared humanity; into a space where we are all truly ONE instead of being separated by the mundane distinctions of race, class or gender that so often govern our existence.

Yet another layer to this bizarre cocktail of 'fantasy meets reality' is the overwhelming emotion that these videos awaken in Will Pharrell, demonstrated in his open sobbing in the already mentioned Oprah - and I am not embarrassed to say that I, too, wept upon watching his reaction. Why? To this day I have no clue!

But for Will Pharrell this is easier to understand. Is it any wonder, after all, if the artist himself is *genuinely* touched by all this, for who could even in their wildest dreams envision anything like this - that one day tens of thousands of people around the world would showcase shared humanity through one's own art (let's call the tune that!). Could there be any more noble outcome for any creative endeavour? Perhaps being in touch with all this provides important inspiration and positive thinking for all of us, thus inflicting something genuinely good in the world - something that so many of us aspire toward but very few can say to have reached with any degree of certainty.

It is difficult to envision other equally high profile, genuinely global scenarios where the union of something both so authentic and so commercial has been equally persuasive or irresistible; it is a rare interplay of the 'light' and 'dark' forces of the world. Which side will prevail at the end?

Any predictions are challenging but this much seems undisputed: the inevitable backlash has already commenced in full vigour. Following Pharell's interview at Oprah a social media uproar followed, embodied by his conceptions of the 'new



black' and resulting in the hashtag #WHATKINDOFBLACKAREYOU. Perhaps the core message here can be summarised as seeing the entire #HAPPY movement as neo-liberal preaching saying

'Everyone Can be Happy for there ARE NO such things as race, borders, or inequality - it is all in your heads! Just see, you too can decide to seize the moment and JUST BE #HAPPY - and we have exactly the right tune for you!'

'What goes up, must come down', or as a Finnish variation of this old wisdom goes 'After laughter come tears'. As is perhaps only fitting, also the downfall of #HAPPY is accompanied by truly surreal twists and turns - the kind that would be impossible for any PR strategist or even an imaginative novelist to conjure up. For according to the news last week [a woman died](#) while driving and simultaneously posting selfies on Facebook, commenting: "The #HAPPY song makes me so HAPPY!"

As tragic as this story is, it feels almost too ironic: indeed, too much #HAPPY can literally be deadly.

Perhaps thus - in a desperate attempt to genuinely understand this bizarre #HAPPY phenomenon - the larger 'cosmic' lesson goes as follows: mere mortals should beware when tampering with such issues as commodifying global happiness as the stakes become awfully high. Here the backlash is the direct outcome of success thereof. Had the song and the videos NOT formed such an enormous phenomenon, the woman in question would likely *not* had been texting about them, and thus would *not* have smashed into the vehicle facing her. Can there be any clearer message. It's just fun and games until someone dies - and now it ain't all #HAPPY any more.

There is still no Allegra #HAPPY video as these past events have made it impossible to add anything to the everything that already exists. Due to an



attempt NOT to contribute to the commercialisation of #HAPPY this post is also free of the customary hyperlinks (except for my original post [here](#)); likely a futile gesture but what else to do?! It's still a great tune though!