

# ZOONOTIC



A NEW PARADIGM FOR DESIGNING  
SUCCESSIONAL VIRAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES  
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Campus

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### FEATURES

Throughout this book there will be a number of recurrent feature sections.

#### EXPERT OPINION

In this feature, I test my ideas on people I respect and who, in my opinion, can provide you, as a reader, with important added value, because they all have expertise in the relevant domain.



#### UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

In this feature I take a closer look at a number of sensational viral business strategies with Zoonotic characteristics, using seven questions as a test to explain their success. These are also useful indicators for your own viral business strategy.

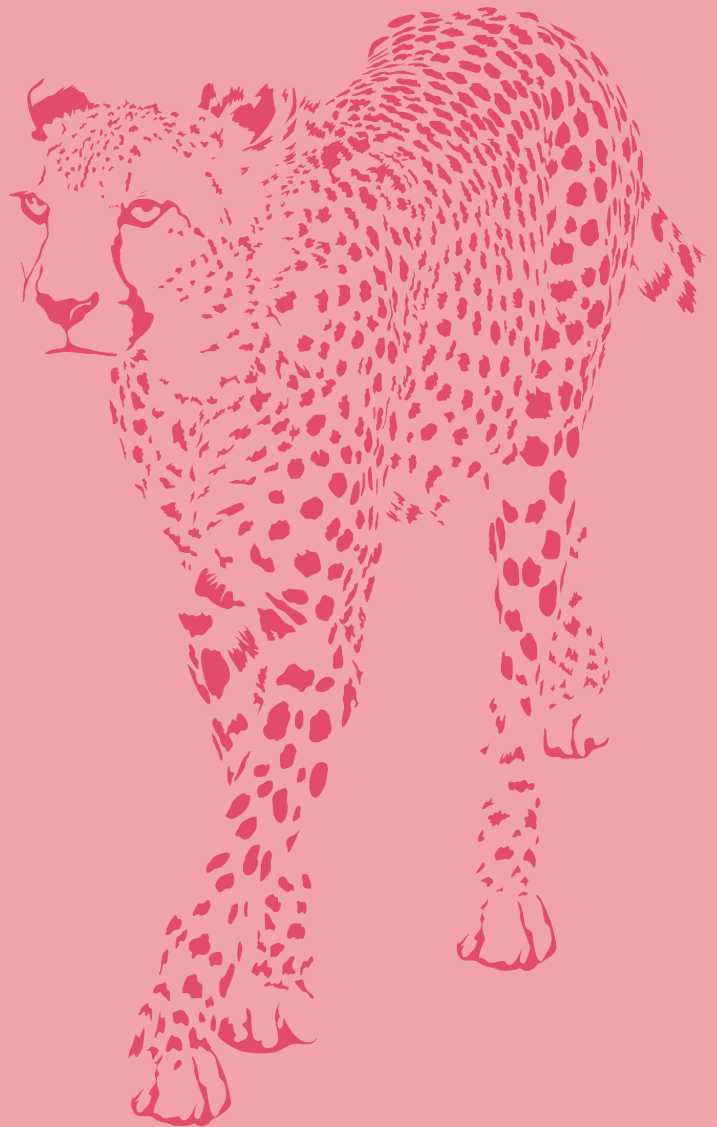


#### INSIGHT

In this feature, I take a brief detour to provide you with some supplementary background information that will give you deeper insight into certain aspects covered in the main body of the text.

#### ONE MORE THING

Steve Jobs and my favourite TV detective Columbo both used this seemingly banal phrase as a prelude to announcing something important. I make grateful use of the same phrase to introduce examples of companies or applications that have become successful as a result of the corona pandemic.



## Introduction

# WHAT DO I WANT TO ACHIEVE WITH THIS BOOK?

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In 2020, we all made our acquaintance with ‘The Big One’ – or was this just the dry run or a sign of something worse to follow? Be that as it may, we all experienced at first hand how powerfully a virus can strike and how quickly the resultant pandemic can spread around our planet. Above all, we learnt how disruptive the consequences can be. Even Dr Peter Piot, a world authority in the field of viral epidemics like AIDS and ebola, said in a podcast (for *De Tijd* newspaper) that he was completely surprised by the speed and the massive societal impact of the crisis, quite apart from the dramatic medical aspects of the situation.

My starting point for this book is my contention that by studying and learning to understand this and other pandemics, it is possible to discover valuable lessons for your own viral business strategy. I am firmly convinced that companies that conquer the world with viral innovations are not just ‘lucky’. On the contrary, and exactly like a pandemic, there is a predictable pattern to their success. Economic principles are not a matter of coincidence. Successful companies follow a clear strategy and have a specific mindset. To attribute something to ‘chance’ means, in my opinion, that we have simply not yet discovered the correlation between the various underlying factors. Usually, that only happens after the event. Even so, that does not mean that it is a pointless exercise. A knowledge of these underlying patterns can often still be of use later on.

In the following pages I will describe the approach taken by companies that conquer the world with their viral business strategies and innovations. I call this strategy 'Zoonotic'. Of all the world's many viruses, the Zoonotics are amongst the most powerful. A Zoonotic is a new and previously unknown virus that occurs when two known viruses combine in a host (which serves as a Superspreader) to create something completely new.

For example, let's imagine that a 'bird' and a 'bat' both infect a host – a 'pig' – with their own individual virus. The pig immediately becomes a Superspreader for their combined viruses. The Cheetah makes a Zoonotic out of this new combination in the form of a new product or a new service, with which to start its exponentially increasing conquest of the world.

**There are clear parallels between the way a  
biological virus works and a viral business strategy.**

A Zoonotic infection is known as a zoonosis. The Spanish flu, which conquered the world by making grateful use of soldiers and refugees returning home after the end of the First World War, is a famous example. However, a business Zoonotic does not make use of trains, boats and planes, but exploits the potential of the world wide web to spread itself. In recent decades, it was primarily the SARS-CoV-2 virus that alerted us to the potential danger of zoonoses. 'The outbreak of this virus [COVID-19] should not really come as a surprise,' wrote Barbara Debusschere in *De Morgen* newspaper. 'Nature is full of little beasties, germs and pathogens. According to an estimate by the Global Virome Project, there are something like 1.67 million undiscovered viruses currently circulating in mammals and birds, half of which can be dangerous for humans. When the Chinese virologist Shi Zhengli, who has been analysing coronaviruses in bats for the past 16 years, discovered that two people in Wuhan were infected with a virus that was similar to the SARS virus, she immediately warned her team that this could become a major problem. Because these experts know all too well that infectious zoonoses are now spreading faster and faster.'

With this kind of infection there is usually an intermediary host, most typically a bird or a mammal. A thousand or so years ago, the measles virus was transferred



to humans via cattle. The plague virus (commonly known in medieval times as the Black Death) used rats as its host. The HIV virus was passed on to humans by chimpanzees.

'But Carole,' I can hear you say, 'isn't it a bit macabre to seek inspiration in a virus that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives world wide and caused incalculable damage to both the economy and to society at large?'

I can understand that some of you perhaps have doubts about my approach. So let me be clear: my inspiration has nothing to do with the deadly effect of the virus, but with the extremely efficient and disruptive impact of a Zoonotic. I am not arguing in favour of a strategy that sows death and destruction! Quite the reverse, in fact. While a biological Zoonotic always has fatal consequences, a business Zoonotic has two possible outcomes, depending on your intentions and your guiding principles. This is what Jonathan Berte of Robovision refers to as 'Good Karma versus Bad Karma'. In instances where things are clearly moving in the wrong direction – in other words, when Bad Karma gains the upper hand – I use the term Predator Zoonotic. Of course, one of the things you need to remember about Karma is that, at the end of the day, it always gives you your just deserts!

**Is it not the dream of every company to find an unstoppable  
– but people-friendly – viral business strategy?**

I want to challenge you to use the intelligent spreading strategy of a Zoonotic as inspiration for an extremely successful, sustainable and viral business strategy for your company. As a business leader and marketeer, I feel a strong compulsion to draw as many positive lessons as possible from the current worldwide pandemic. That is simply my nature as a hyperkinetic, positive-thinking entrepreneur!

There is also another reason why I am extra-interested in viruses: I have twice been a victim of their insidious power. On the first occasion, this was almost fatal. For weeks, my life hung by a slender thread. This was followed by months of uncertainty, a feeling that has never completely left me. More recently, in 2019, I was infected again during a study trip to... China, of all places! So perhaps it is hardly surprising that I am fascinated by the intelligent strategies used by these micro-

## EXPERT OPINION

### Professor Dr Marc Buelens

Emeritus professor, Vlerick Business School

#### The limits of a metaphor

My clients know that I like to challenge them. For my part, I also like to be challenged – and certainly by someone like Professor Dr Marc Buelens, emeritus professor of the Vlerick Business School, who is renowned in his field for his sharp and critical mind, with which he analyses and dissects management and organisational theories with scientific precision. This is his reaction to my idea about using the Zoonotic as a metaphor for a viral business strategy.

‘If, without wishing to compromise my intellectual integrity too far, I look dispassionately at the message of someone who has invested her soul in a fascinating new marketing concept, I am forced to conclude that many others before her have also found inspiration in the most diverse images, models and studies. Markets have been compared with doughnuts, the 4 Ps, frogs, the 7 Ss, networks, and water running through a pipe system, to name but a few. If grown adults are convinced that they can find inspiration for their business ventures in such matters, who am I to gainsay them? Carole has a remarkably wide experience of her field. Consequently, there is a strong likelihood that she has developed a form of intelligent intuition, which allows her to see what others cannot (yet) see. However, formulating intuition and channelling it into models is always a difficult task and the question then becomes whether or not any criticism applies to the basic insight or to its subsequent formulation.

A model – let’s call it a theory – only becomes relevant if it makes it possible for us to predict in advance whether players in the market will be successful (or not) because of their adherence (or not) to that theory.

A metaphor does not need to be perfect. All it must do is identify and illustrate the key elements. Viral marketing and the reference to a unique phenomenon in medical science – zoonotic pathogens – allows us to illustrate something that it was not possible to illustrate as tellingly before; namely, lightning-fast technology, social media and many other facets of the “winner takes all” marketplace. It illustrates the success of some (I emphasise the word “some”) hybrid technologies, of some bizarre and unique successes, etc., etc.

A strong metaphor also needs to make clear when its precepts will not be applicable, and these areas must be more than mere trivialities. So let me briefly make misuse of the virus world to show how such an approach can be misleading. Let us look at things from the point of view of the virus. To begin with, there are an awful lot of them. One website tells me 100,939,140. Another says that they are more numerous than the stars (although this I doubt). But let us say that, as an entrepreneur, I am a virus, one of the 100 million. So why am I not COVID-19? In that case, the story becomes less fun. Most viruses are anything but successful. On the contrary, they lead quiet and largely hidden lives. So why take an exception as the basis for a model? You can push this kind of reasoning a stage further. It is also easy to defend yourself against a virus: just wash your hands and keep a safe distance! In this way, your product will never reach me, because I, like most consumers, will do the customer equivalent of applying basic hygiene and social distancing rules. So what can persuade me (and them) not to do this? That is a fascinating question, and one that I would like to discuss in more detail with every group of managers and entrepreneurs. So the virus metaphor is a strong one. But no more than that.’

scopically small intruders. This book is my way to turn my personal misfortune with viruses into a positive and meaningful experience.

I want to show you how insight into the power and the spreading speed of a Zoonotic can inspire you to develop your own extremely successful viral business strategy or, if that is not possible, how you can defend yourself – by ‘flattening the curve’ – against a Zoonotic attack in your market. In contrast to a biological virus, the objective of a commercial Zoonotic strategy is to have positive effects for both your company and your customers. Primarily, it is your competitors who need to be most concerned about your Zoonotic approach and will suffer most from its consequences.

**In my book *Unfair Advantage* I introduced the metaphor of the Cheetah. With this book I want to build on that image by challenging the Cheetah to move beyond the confines of its familiar savannah landscape and expand its territory much more quickly than ever before.**

To complement the worthwhile considerations of Professor Dr Marc Buelens, I would like to emphasise that in the first instance my purpose with the Zoonotic metaphor is to offer you a conceptual model that will stimulate and inspire you by helping you to structure the unknown. This is easiest to do by using a striking and instantly memorable metaphor that strikes a chord not only with major international companies, but also with the many tens of thousands of small and independent entrepreneurs, managers and NGOs.

**I want to encourage people to act positively for change, rather than passively watching and waiting for failure.**

In the first part of the book, I will describe precisely what I mean by a Zoonotic, not simply by outlining a basic model, but above all by illustrating my arguments with a series of diverse examples, ranging from Uber via Duolingo to Botox! In this way, you will discover that a Zoonotic always begins with a new and previously unknown combination of elements, which, from the moment they combine,

will expand at an exponential speed, just like a prowling Cheetah, until the world has been conquered.

In the second part, I will describe how you can become a Zoonotic. Using your core – which I call your Unfair Advantage – as a starting point, I will show how you can give the kick-off as a fully fledged Zoonotic leader, supported by a super-flexible Zoonotic team. To complete this section, I will challenge you to make use of the seven exercises that will allow you to get moving in the right direction.

Finally, in part three, I will outline how you can best defend yourself against a Zoonotic attack. Initially, you will need to navigate like a Cheetah in a sandstorm, where your quick and flexible reactions will hopefully enable you to avoid the threat or at least allow you to limit the damage.

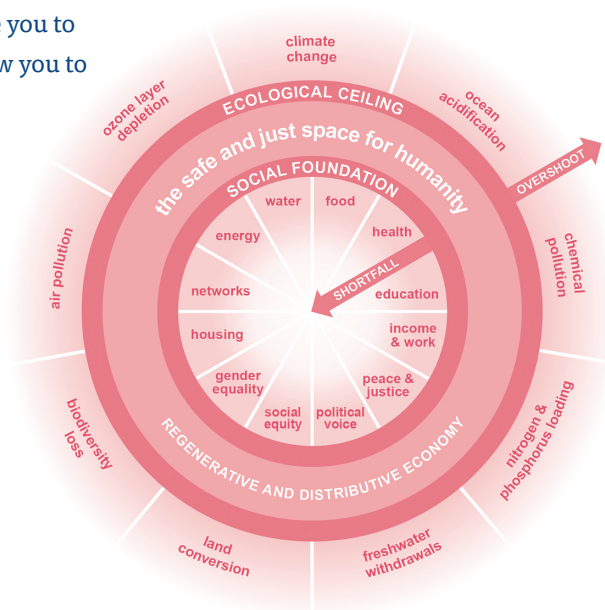
## EXPERT OPINION

### Kate Raworth

University of Oxford  
University of Cambridge

#### The doughnut as a metaphor

The doughnut model, as described by Kate Raworth in her book *Doughnut Economics*, is a superb example of a powerful, visually simple and coherent metaphor. The hole in the middle of the doughnut symbolises the people whose basic needs in terms of food, health care, education, etc. are not met. The innermost ring of the doughnut indicates the lowest social and societal boundary, while the outermost ring delineates the ecological limits of our planet. The central core of the doughnut is the zone where social and economic needs are fulfilled for as many people as possible. This is 'the safe and just space for humanity', as Raworth calls it. The challenge is to move the people who are currently in the 'hole' (= shortfall) into the doughnut zone, but without exceeding the ecological capacity of the planet (= overshoot). The fact that Raworth indicates twelve lower social limits and nine upper ecological limits means that this doughnut model can also be used as a policy instrument.



Source: *Doughnut Economics*, Kate Raworth



PART 1

# **WHAT IS A ZOOONOTIC?**

“  
The battle against COVID-19 is like a new  
world war, but this time we are all on the same side.  
”

This is a book about successful viral business strategies that have a biological virus as their role model. In this first part, you will discover what a Zoonotic is – with different examples to make the concept more concrete – and will explore the five basic characteristics of a Zoonotic virus with me, namely:

1. A Zoonotic combines two existing viral successes to create something totally new.
2. A Zoonotic makes clever use of influencers.
3. A Zoonotic often begins its existence as a dormant, almost invisible entity.
4. Once it starts to expand, a Zoonotic grows at an exponential speed.
5. A Zoonotic regards the entire world as its territory.

Bill Gates





# 1

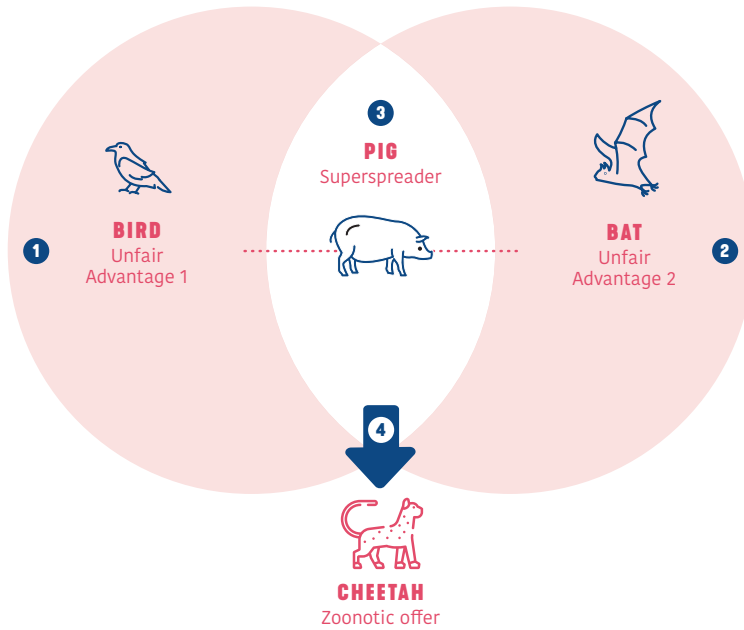
## A NEW AND PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN COMBINATION

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Precisely because it makes use of a new and previously unknown combination, a Zoonotic can initially remain under the radar and escape attention from others. The new combination does not relate in any way to existing systems, knowledge or insights. With a biological Zoonotic, this results in an often fatal weakening of the inadequate immune system of human beings. With a business Zoonotic, it results in an extremely disruptive policy model, which often has fatal consequences for the competition.

If innovation is described as the process by which something of value is created through the application of a new solution to an existing problem of significance, then I would regard a Zoonotic as a hyper-innovator.

The diagram below is a model-based depiction of the Zoonotic metaphor. The bird is the carrier of Unfair Advantage 1; the bat is the carrier of Unfair Advantage 2. Together, these Unfair Advantages form a new combination in the pig, which acts as the Superspreader. The Cheetah is the new Zoonotic offer: the new product or service that will conquer the world.



A new and previously unknown biological virus can succeed in remaining under the radar and subsequently infect the entire world, because such viruses have the most remarkable survival mechanisms. They make intelligent use of hosts to reproduce and spread themselves. However, if it wants to secure its own future, it is important for a virus not to be too efficient or aggressive. For example, the Ebola virus is so deadly that it risks jeopardising its own survival, because ultimately it becomes hard to find live hosts to ensure its continued spread. In the business world, Uber is a good example of an over-aggressive business Zoonotic, which resulted in some countries and cities banning the company. Personally, I am not a great fan of this kind of business culture.

### An over-aggressive Zoonotic can destroy its own market.

Sometimes, a business Zoonotic needs to take a 'chill pill' to temper its aggression, so that it can come back stronger than ever when the time is right. Take, for example, Google Earth. Their approach is not 'in-your-face' aggressive, but has still been sufficiently Zoonotic to rapidly conquer a market. According to Google's own figures, they now cover 98 percent of the inhabited world. Conclusion? If you want to become a successful Zoonotic, sometimes it is a good idea to rein in your ambition so that you do not bring about your own downfall by being too eager.

### LINGUISTIC ZONOSIS

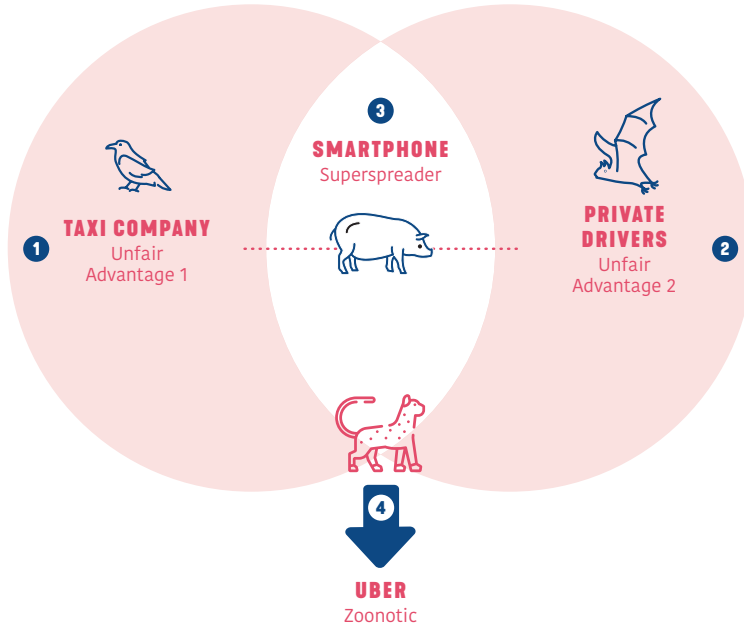
The corona crisis certainly stimulated our creativity. One of the results was a plethora of new word combinations, from lockdown parties via cough-shame to balcony solidarity. But there is one combination that has become more popular than all the rest and has spread around the world in different languages like a true Zoonotic. In English, this is the combination of ‘cuddle’ and ‘buddy’, to describe the people with whom you can have close contact. In Dutch, this translates as ‘knuffelcontact’, which was chosen as ‘word of the year’ in Flanders, in part because of its warm connotations. It was first coined by the Belgian Minister of Health, Frank Vandenbroucke, on national television, thereby creating the basis for this linguistic Zoonotic.

### What are successful Zoonotics like?

Before I take you step by step on a voyage of discovery through the Zoonotic success formula, it may be useful to start by giving a number of concrete examples. In this way, it will become clear what I mean when I talk about a Zoonotic and how this viral business strategy is capable of turning an established market completely on its head.

#### > UBER

Uber caused a veritable pandemic in the taxi market. The business model of the classic taxi companies came under extreme pressure. The great advantage of Uber is its ease of use: you register just once, press a button and your taxi is ordered! The initial anger and resistance of the taxi sector has since resulted in the development of creative apps that now allow customers to access classic taxi services in a more user-friendly way. For example, the Traveller Connect application not only makes it simple to book and pay for a taxi, but also makes it possible to follow its actual position. In my opinion, Uber’s Achilles’ heel is their seeming lack of respect for their self-employed drivers. To be honest, this callous attitude makes me really angry.



### EXPERT OPINION

#### Scott Galloway

New York University

#### Uber is 'capital light'

According to Scott Galloway, one of the major trump cards of Uber is the way the company uses the assets of others as a lever. The drivers are not on the payroll and Uber does not need to invest in a car fleet, so that it also saves on insurance and maintenance costs. Much the same is true of Airbnb, which does not invest in buildings, personnel, catering, cleaning, etc. As a result, these companies are less capital intensive, so that they are able to downscale more quickly in the event of a crisis such as the corona pandemic, simply because they have fewer fixed costs. Airbnb is the strongest brand in the travel and hospitality business, with more than 7 million rooms in its portfolio. That is more than all its competitors combined. Did you know that in percentage terms they employ more technical experts and engineers than Amazon, Lyft or Uber? As a result, their business model is totally different from those of traditional hotels.

As already mentioned, there is a danger that Uber has become an over-aggressive Zoonotic, so that some cities and even whole countries have banned the company, as can be seen on the following map of the world.