

VIRAL MARKETING: AN EMERGING PARADIGM AND AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS THROUGH CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

From Word of Mouth to Word of Mouse, the traditional shackles of marketing seems to be finally broken. The emergence of various social constructs assisted by the ever advancing technology paves way for continuous innovation and thus its ultimate diffusion. There lies a blue ocean too vast on the horizon and deep down the crust. However, the ripple effect (positive or negative) created from it are all but out of the hands of the organisations. Viral Marketing creates a snowball effect and gains momentum within a very short span of time at a much faster speed. The strategy has become a priority from being an option. The established players of the industry are already reaping its benefits while the laggards are following suit. The major objective of the work undertaken intends to generate competent knowledge about the trending paradigm and identify important determinants of a viral marketing campaign. An in depth study has been done to examine factors responsible behind the success as well as the failure of Viral Marketing Campaigns of two different organisations. The third case is a recent study on Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis(ALS) famously known for the Ice Bucket Challenge. It involves the analysis and future implications regarding the viral marketing effort taken by ALS. The information shall also enrich further development and refinement of the conceptual framework and assist the marketers and strategists for broadening the marketing outlook.

Key Words: Viral Marketing, Social Networking Site, Viral Marketing Campaign.

1. Introduction

The traditional marketing concepts now seems to be exhausted making the competition fiercest than ever. What marketers need are new strategies or concepts to gain a better edge over their competitors. Viral Marketing answers one of the biggest marketing challenges faced by organisations today, drawing attention of an advertising saturated mind. The introduction of high-speed Internet infrastructure along with the wide scale penetration of bandwidth into

consumers' homes during the early part of the decade changed the very nature of marketing. Where once limited to such traditional methods of marketing, there now lies a new scope of marketing basically with the neo modern marketing methods. Prior to this, the consumers were only the end users of the marketing philosophy but now they can also play a role as essential players in the distribution of the message.

The birth of viral marketing has certainly changed the very nature of marketing. It has emerged as the electronic form of word of mouth creating instantaneous buzz and involves the principle of passing on or referring news, information, or entertainment to another person. (Cruz & Fill, 2008). This strategy is unique from almost any other marketing formats as consumers receive information from friends rather than from the marketers themselves. In addition, consumers view the message at their convenience as they choose the time and place to open and view it. Many new digital technologies allow consumers to work in collaboration with others, connect with people who share similar interests and goals, and create and circulate media content. Throughout this process, these technologies have changed the ways that a consumer networks (Jenkins, 2010). Modern social networks like Instant Messaging, Watsapp, Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace are characterized by the potential for real-time interaction, reduced anonymity (with Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, etc., but not with blogs and lists), a sense of propinquity (brought on by the use of avatars, graphical interfaces, automated messages, etc.), short response times (often because of the number of users/members participating), and the ability to "time shift" or engage the social network whenever suits each particular member. Moreover traditional forms of social media (personal letters, letters to the editor, etc.) are not of the same way because they are not often capable of supporting interactions by people in vast social networks, because they do not take place in "real time," and, perhaps the most important, they do not allow time shifting.

The growth of social networking significantly contributed to the effectiveness of viral marketing. Today, the viral agent has spread like a wildfire across the web offering a much needed change from the exhausted traditional mediums of advertising. 4.2 billion people access social media sites via mobile devices with 189 million Facebook users being 'mobile only'. YouTube has over 1 billion unique visitors per month. Users send out 58 million tweets per day, with 9,100 happening every second. However, there are 222 million Twitters who just watch other people's tweets. According to the International Association of Business Communicators, "more than half of all Internet users have joined a social network; social networks have become the number one platform for creating and sharing content" (Young, 2009). 93% of marketers are using social media for business. 70% of marketers used Facebook to gain new

customers. A 2012 study found that 52% of people who view news online forward it on through social networks, email, or posts. 91% of mobile Internet access is for social activities. Around 46% of web users will look towards social media when making a purchase. The statistics prove that social media is becoming even more integrated in our daily lives.

Viral marketing has generated a lot of excitement in recent years, in part because it seems like the ultimate free lunch: Pick some small number of people to “seed” your idea, message or product; get it to “go viral”; and then watch while it relentlessly spreads to reach millions, all on a shoestring marketing budget. Originally identified and coined as a phenomenon that extends way beyond simply network-enhanced word-of-mouth, viral marketing has changed the very nature of online WOM (Jurvetson, 2000). It is the most powerful element in today's changing landscape of the world wide web and the social media. The art of going viral is the marketer's trump card in the age of consumer 2.0. A promotional method that is of the customers, by the customers and for the customers, viral marketing is all about social sharing of emotions.

Viral Marketing : Welker (2002) described viral marketing as “strategies that allow an easier, accelerated, and cost-reduced transmission of messages by creating environments for an self-replicating, exponentially increasing diffusion, spiritualization, and impact of the message.”

Social Networking Site : In the words of Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison (2008), Social Network Sites are web based services that allow individuals to create a public profile, to create a list of users with whom to share connections, and view and cross the connections within the system.

Viral Marketing Campaign : According to Theresa Howard, Viral Marketing or Viral Advertising or Marketing buzz are buzzwords referring to marketing techniques that use pre existing social networking services and other technologies to try to produce increase in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through self replicating viral processes analogous to the spread of viruses or computer viruses (cf. internet memes or memetics). It can be delivered by word of mouth or enhanced by the network effects of the internet and mobile networks.

2. Literature review

Since the early 1950s researchers have shown that Word of Mouth not only influences consumers' choices and purchase decisions (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955), but it also shapes pre-usage attitudes (Herr et al., 1991) and even post-usage perceptions of a product or service

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(Bone, 1992). In the words of Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook "People influence people. Nothing influences people more than a recommendation from a trusted friend. A trusted friend referral influences people more than the best broadcast message. A trusted friend referral is the holy grail of advertising."

There is debate about the origination and the popularization of the term viral marketing, although some of the earliest uses of the term are attributed to the Harvard Business School graduate Tim Draper and faculty member Jeffrey Rayport. The term was later popularized by Rayport in the 1996 Fast Company article "The Virus of Marketing" and Tim Draper and Steve Jurvetson of the venture capital firm Draper Fisher Jurvetson in 1997 that described the practice by Hotmail of appending advertising to outgoing mail from their users. Among the very first to write about viral marketing on the Internet was the famous media critic Doug Rushkoff. The assumption is that if such an advertisement reaches a "susceptible" user, that user becomes "infected" (i.e., accepts the idea) and shares the idea with others "infecting them," in the viral analogy's terms. As long as each infected user shares the idea with more than one susceptible user on average, the number of infected users grows according to an exponential curve. The intent for the advertisements is to go viral organically and be distributed by online word-of-mouth communication (Porter & Golan, 2006).

Several scholars have pointed out to the emergence of the eWOM or Word of Mouse phenomenon whereas new communication platforms enhanced and occasionally transformed the nature of world of mouth communication via the Internet and the World Wide Web (Helm, 2000; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Emanuel Rosen, author of "The Anatomy of Buzz Revisited" defines "buzz broadly to include word of mouth (or consumer-to-consumer communication regarding brands), plus world of Web (online word of mouth), as well as all other interpersonal communication, including second-hand buzz and consumers visually displaying brands" (Wojnicki, 2009).

In the words of Ergo, Viral don't self propagate, they can't be pushed. But experiences are spread deliberately by people. Viral campaign success is dependent on a consumer's willingness to share a message to others within his or her social circle (Tang, 2006). Although there is an emotional side to consumer behaviour that can and should not be ignored. The role of emotion in advertising also needs to be brought to attention as a motivation for consumer sharing (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). Emotional content has the ability to form or change a consumer's attitude towards an advertisement. Previous research finds that people are more likely to share positive content that elicits emotion (Dobele et al., 2006). Berger and Milkman's (2009) findings suggest that people not only share content that contains useful

information, but sharing occurs for the emotional experience. A prior study (Marini and Wiedemann, 2006) has reported that personal messages sent by friends gain more credibility than those coming directly from the self-interested advertiser. In addition, consumers who get the initial message from a familiar recommender proved to participate frequently in a campaign as initial contacts. The content of the message remains the same whilst it could be biased and filtered during traditional word of mouth communication (Helm, 2000). A research shows that 90% of dissatisfied consumers do not purchase products or services of the company involved in a negative word-of-mouth communication (Solomon, 2003). These consumers shall communicate their dissatisfaction to at least nine other people and 13% of these dissatisfied consumers shall communicate their negative view to more than thirty people.

The marketing instrument offers three basic marketing strategies – pull, push and viral strategies. In pull strategies consumers explicitly request content from marketers. In push strategies marketers address consumers to distribute or to communicate content. In viral strategies information exchange occurs between consumers (Wiedemann, 2007). Thus, the ultimate goal of marketers in creating successful viral marketing programs is to develop viral messages which appeal to individuals with high social networking potential and that have a high probability of being presented and spread by the individuals in their communications in a very short period of time. At the heart of any viral marketing or advertising campaign stands that viral factor known as the “meme” variable that is essential for any viral campaign (Dawkins, 1976) and that ultimately leads users to share content with friends and online communities (Chiu et al. 2007). Consequently, many managers believe that a Web site needs to provide community content in order to build brand loyalty (McWilliams (2000) or Fingar, Kumar, and Sharma (2000)).

Research Methodology

The research conducted is completely based on secondary data from reliable and well tracked sources.

Research Objectives

Objectives of the study under consideration are-

1. To synthesis emerging literature on Viral Marketing.
2. To identify important elements that determine the success or failure of a viral marketing campaign through analysis of case studies.

The paper is divided into 5 sections. The first section provides a brief introduction to the topic under study. The second section reviews the historic literature. The main section of the research emphasises the Viral marketing concept and the basic characteristics that differentiates it from the traditional word of mouth marketing. It also highlights the factors that make viral marketing campaign, a success or failure. The fourth section involves an in-depth analysis of 3 case studies. The final section provides the conclusion and the recommendation.

3. Viral marketing

Viral marketing is an intentional/unintentional strategic tool used for exponential growth of a brand/sales/product of an organisation which creates a phenomenon that facilitates and encourages people to pass along a marketing message.

The heart of any viral campaign is the content, supported by a fresh concept which is engaging and exciting. People spread the ad because they can't but adore the creativity of the content. They become self serving evangelists of the brand. The point of a viral campaign is not only to go viral but also to meet the brand objective strategically. Viral marketing may take the form of eBooks, video clips, images, text messages, web pages, interactive flash games, email messages, advergames, brand able software, etc.

Of the emerging new marketing streams, viral marketing is positioned firmly in the e-marketing domain. The other major domain that viral marketing fits into is marketing communications. While conventional communication in marketing directly addresses the consumer, viral marketing communication aims to create an environment where customers transmit messages without the involvement of the original source. The underlying principle of viral communication, however, remains the 'traditional' word-of-mouth paradigm that is now facilitated by the Internet.

People share content to deepen social connections (Berger & Milkman, 2009). Since no user is likely to forward a boring advertisement to a friend, the ad must include a "viral component" in it, a component that makes any ad forward able from one user to another. This viral component is referred to in both professional and academic research of viral marketing as the Meme (Dawkins, 1976; Godin, 2001). There isn't any science in viral marketing involved. Once a viral is released, it will most likely spread itself without the marketer's constant backing. The key is to tap into the viral marketing phenomenon to potentially get in front of millions of people with only a fraction of the cost of a traditional advertising campaign.

The Internet makes it possible for a campaign to go viral very fast; it can make a brand famous overnight. However, the Internet and social media technologies themselves do not

make a brand viral; they just enable people to share content to other people faster. Porter and Golan (2006) found that most viral advertisements included one or more of the following advertising appeals: sexuality, humour, violence, or nudity. These could be identified as the “meme” components of these viral ads. Porter and Golan (2006) identified differences in the use of advertising appeals not only across media (television versus viral) but also across industry.

The paradigm shift in communication flowing top down from mainstream media to bottom up from consumers through social media has created a new sense of belonging to the brand. Mass media advertising has numbed the consumers to brand messages online. Virals interact with and engage the 'bored user' with creative content on popular Web 2.0 sites like Facebook, Digg, Reddit, Youtube, Myspace, etc and compel them to expose it by spreading the word.

According to marketing professors Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2011), to make viral marketing work, three elements must be taken care of namely Messenger (3 type of messengers namely market mavens, social hubs, and salespeople), message (memorable and interesting) and environment (the timing and context of the campaign). In short, giving the right message to the right messengers in the right environment.

Table 1 : Difference Between Word Of Mouth Marketing And Viral Marketing

Factor	Word Of Mouth Marketing	Viral Marketing
Period of concept	Traditional concept	Modern concept
Emphasis	Emphasis lies on product development	Emphasis lies on putting viral factor into product
Nature of Diffusion	Simple or Organic	Compound or amplified
Type of Effect	Echo effect(initially high but later fades)	Viral Effect(initially low but later explodes)
Type of Media	Offline	Online
Use of Social Media	Insignificant or Low	High Use
Message Carrier/Campaign driver	Business(marketers)	Consumers
Speed of Transmission	Low to Medium	Medium to High
Growth potential	Low Growth potential	Huge potential due to exponential

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		factor
Network Effects	Low effect	High effect
Probability of change in message	High probability	Low probability
Type of Business suited for	Small scale business	Large scale business

Critical factors for viral marketing campaigns

Creating brand advocates is the basic aim of the campaign. The organisations must know their unique customer aspirations and unique selling proposition. The time has come when it demands building the digital side of promotion first.

A number of critical factors applicable to viral marketing campaigns are emerging whilst the relevant literature acknowledges five key issues that critically influences viral marketing campaigns: the characteristics of the diffusion, the peer to peer information conduit, the content of the message, the characteristics of the product or service and lastly the overall structure of the campaign.

Table 2 : Critical Factors For Viral Marketing Campaign

Critical Factor	Specific Aspects
Diffusion characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exponential • Speed • Audience reach
Peer to peer information conduit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channels available and used • Technology available and used • Combination of technology leveraged • Source credibility
Message content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagination • Fun and intrigue • Ease of use • Engaging

Product service characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suitability
Overall campaign structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourages viral activity• Ethical and legal issues

4. Case studies

An in depth analysis is done to understand the critical factors involved which makes marketing campaign a success or failure. This however is done by studying three case studies. The first case depicts how an organisation named Urban Hilton Weiner achieved success through its viral marketing campaign. The second case points out the shortcomings of an organisation Capcom in achieving its objective and how it backfired. The third and the last case is of ALS Ice Bucket Challenge which is analyzed and the future implications of the same are stated.

Case No 1 - Urban Hilton Weiner

About

Fashion retailer, Urban Hilton in Africa wasn't particularly a big name before their campaign but now they are one of the most talked brands in fashion. They decided to come up with a campaign "pay with a selfie" to promote engagement on social media as well as getting the customers to make in store purchases. The idea behind the campaign was to get customers to think how much they believe their 'selfie' is worth. Their campaign was meant to run for one day in November, but the popularity and success had caused them to extend it for a longer period. Participants were required to follow the retailer on twitter (@UrbanSelfie) as well as like them on facebook (Urban Degree). Next, they had to visit one of the stores during the promotion period. While trying on the merchandise, the customers were to snap a selfie and immediately tweet the picture to @UrbanSelfie using the hashtag #urbanselfie. Once at the checkout, customers were to show their tweets to the sales associate to receive a discount of \$10 towards the purchase. If one was really lucky and the folks at the Urban decided that "selfie had iconic Urban style, they could even get \$20 towards the purchase". According to the retailer, the most retweeted selfie could win an Urban Degree wardrobe worth \$1000. That's not all though. If they uploaded the selfie to the retailer's facebook page and got the most likes, they stood a chance of winning a long weekend in New York, London, Tokyo or a fashion capital of their choice.

Response

The campaign was a hit because it encouraged the retailer's fans and customers to engage with their social media channels in real time. It required customers to make in-store purchases at that point in time, not later. UHW used their different channels to advertise for the promotion which helped create buzz about the campaign through their online community and did not just rely on in-store foot traffic to spread the word. The trend of taking "selfie" had become common in society, so it made sense for a business to jump on board with a campaign that focused on that activity.

Interpretation

The initial factor of diffusion was very well used by the company as it involved the medium of facebook and twitter. The exponential factor was very much present and that is evident of the fact that they had to extend their campaign to 15 days which primarily was planned for only a single day. The campaign was a particular hit on facebook adding 16,947 likes and 873,351 impressions.

The peer to peer conduit is the second crucial factor to this campaign's success. The company used a combination of channels without solely relying upon the foot traffic and thus engaged on social media sites. Thus, the credibility of the source supplying the message information was more familiar to the target.

Message content forms the third factor to be taken into consideration. The creative team behind the Urban Selfie campaign understood what made selfie-lovers tick i.e. sharing photos of themselves. So rather than create branded content for fans to share, the campaign encouraged fans to create their own content. What Urban had demonstrated was the ability to engage its customers in a fun way, a manner that encourages silliness combined with the need to share their experiences. This campaign generated three levels of engagement namely the initial tweet or Facebook post from fans, Retweets and Likes on each post, amplified by the original poster's chance to win a larger prize and general Follows and Likes on the Urban Twitter and Facebook accounts.

The next factor is the product service characteristics which very much fits into the campaign as evident from the statistics generated within a very short period of time. The sales rose to much higher than those on an average.

The overall campaign structure is the last crucial factor to the success of a campaign. Not only did Urban enjoy a surge of new social media fans, they also experienced an increase in sales as a direct result of this campaign. According to the retailer, the average basket size of an #UrbanSelfie customer was particularly high on the days of the campaign. This ingenious

marketing technique accomplished everything that any retailer would had wanted from a social media campaign – it exposed people to specific items of clothing, encourages social sharing, and most importantly, got people in stores and buying clothes they wouldn't have otherwise purchased. While the \$10 coupon may seemed excessive and could put many companies off, taking such a bold move it's a small price to pay for such widespread and effective exposure.

Case No 2 - Capcom's Resident Evil Game

About

Resident Evil is a zombie game which is played on consoles, produced by Sony. The campaign was pretty straight forward; people could register on the website of the game to get early and exclusive content. So a lot of people registered with their email and mobile phone number. Instead of the usual email response from the company the people got a text message saying: "Outbreak: I'm infecting you with T-virus, My Code is 828294." With this code they could log in the game's website and check out exclusive movies about the film. T- Virus was a virus where the game was all about.

Response

It was an effective plan and it could have gone viral, although the reverse happened. Though the messages didn't affect the person's cell phones, Sony's marketing ploy provoked panic. The video game was not able to garner a lot of traffic. Sony's Resident Evil mobile marketing campaign backfired when people thought they were receiving actual mobile viruses. Some people considered it to be a serious threat and removed the game immediately from their respective gadgets. They started thinking it as being an actual virus. Words on the social media emerged from the gamers in contrary to the campaign and the company failed to take the social media aspect into account initially. Later, the agency which created the campaign, CE Europe, eventually sent out a press release admitting the mistake.

Interpretation

The first success factor which involved the diffusion characteristics were not upto the mark as they only used text messages. There was no exponential factor involved initially but the audience reach was direct to the target customers.

The second factor is peer to peer information conduit. In the case of Resident's Evil, the company opted to use only a single medium of text messages and as such there is no medium of communicating to the peers. Although they had better technology available, they didn't

quite make use of that. Had they used the online media, the possibility of reaching the masses was positive.

The next critical factor is message content. The message that the company passed through to their users was unique in its own sense. The content was creative and ingenious but it failed to assimilate into the minds of the target group. Overall, this part of the campaign being the most crucial failed miserably.

The product service characteristics looks for the suitability of the product among the target. The approach was one sided as the company failed to take into account the expected reaction of the gamers. Thus, making it unsuitable for the users to risk their gadgets and ultimately resulted in uninstalling the game.

The last critical factor is the overall campaign structure which takes into account the possibility of the campaign going viral and also the legal and ethical issues related to it, if any.

The campaign did go viral but only on behalf of the gamers calling it against the original campaign as anticipated by the company. There could have been legal issues but only on the part of the company coming into act by way of press release.

Case No 3 - Als

About

The challenge is to raise awareness about Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis which is Neuro Degenerative and is also known as Motor Neurone Disease(NMD) or Lou Gehrig's Disease. It is a progressive neuro degenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord.

US Baseball and ALS patient, Pete Frates floated the idea of the challenge in a video on a social networking site. Though it didn't start as a charity specific initiative, it was basically an awareness campaign for the ALS Association. On getting challenged by someone, the user had to post a video of themselves dumping a bucket of ice cold water over their heads. Once soaked in cold water, they would extend the challenge to at least three others and ask them to either do the same or make a donation of \$100 to the organisation dedicated to fighting ALS. Nominated people had 24 hours to comply. There were other attempts prior to the ALS initiative but were unsuccessful.

Response

The response was initially slow but exploded later on. The internet had gone viral with videos of celebrities and other popular personalities taking the Ice Bucket Challenge. In just seven days, donations had skyrocketed from \$22.6 million by an average of \$9 million per day, now totalling \$88.5 million. Youtube cites around 2,330,000 videos related to Ice Bucket Challenge. Over 28 million people had joined the conversation on facebook starting from 1 June 2014 to 17 August. ALS mentions in social increased 1007% and ones that mentioned Lou Gehrig's Disease increased 1167% in the first few weeks. The ALS association had raised around \$100 million in 31 days or to be concise \$37 a second. That is around 40 times compared to the same period last year (\$2.5 million in the previous year).

Interpretation

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge incorporated the first critical success factor, an exponential and fast diffusion that is reached a wide range of audiences. With the number of hits the videos of the people and celebrities were getting and the 'buzz' about the concept that spread around the world, the diffusion is characterised as being exponential.

The second critical factor, i.e. peer-to-peer information conduit, incorporates communication channels and technology available, used and leveraged by the message senders. 'Buzz' about the concept was generated by a large number of people viewing as well as doing it measured by way of statistics. It involved social conformity as people used to challenge others while aiming at network strengthening.

When it comes to the content, the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was personal. The message of the challenge was engaging, imaginative and also fun to watch and intrigued through its simplicity. The focus was clear and rightly timed. The videos were based on both vision and sound. It showed the process of how to conduct the challenge. It provided a reason to present about oneself while giving the cause more concreteness. It was a social proof as it lowered the threshold of adoption. It hold participation by the people easier as it involved no barrier. Picking at least three others to follow the same not only broadened participation but it also ensured sustainment. It was contagious in nature.

The question of Product Service Characteristics doesn't comes into consideration in this case study.

When it comes to the last success factor, i.e. the overall campaign structure, the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge has been produced out to create awareness. Although it has contributed millions, there was no identifiable commercial reason by the ALS before it went viral. There are no obvious ethical issues associated with the video.

ALS received free marketing, associated with enjoyment, without their involvement. Whether the organisations would have chosen to get involved in the first place remains open to question and shows the lack of control that organisations have over viral marketing.

Future Implications

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge has generated huge amount of donations crossing \$100 million mark. It holds the following implications:

- Not many suffer from ALS, there are more important diseases to fight. The donations are being rarely targeted properly. Funding ALS may take away donations from other organisations.
- The campaign has been followed blindly as a trend. What is more important is to educate about the motor neurone disease.
- The campaign has given rise to other campaigns as well like My tree challenge, Book list challenge, Rice bucket challenge, etc. As a result, there is a scope of a new breed of campaigns being initiated at various levels in the near future.

5. Conclusion And Recommendations

This paper synthesised the emerging literature on viral marketing and identified important factors that should be considered when organising a viral marketing campaign. The paper first defined viral marketing and reviewed emerging research streams. It then identified the benefits and challenges associated with viral marketing and presented the critical factors that were needed to be considered when organising viral marketing campaigns. The paper then explored these factors in the context of three case studies. The paper concluded with the development of a viral marketing campaign typology before outlining future research possibilities and practical implications.

As a relatively new advertising technique, viral marketing has received limited attention from management scholars. The current study attempted to fill in the tapestry on viral advertising research by contributing to the literature of this new online advertising phenomenon.

Based on existing knowledge, five types of viral marketing factors that may critically influence the success of viral marketing campaigns are identified. These factors are the overall structure of the campaign, the characteristics of the product or service, the content of the message, the characteristics of the diffusion and, the peer-to-peer information conduit.

However, further work is necessary to generate various models for the policy makers to pursue. This further research would allow for deeper empirical analysis of viral marketing strategies followed by their implications.

The future of advertising is no longer limited to traditional media. For advertising and marketing practitioners, being found online is the ultimate goal. Although as appealing as the viral model of marketing seems in theory, its practical implementation is greatly complicated. One may need to design and conduct dozens or even hundreds of such campaigns before one of them succeeds; and even if a campaign is successful at spreading it still might not propagate the desired message of the advertiser.

Future studies should provide more sophisticated analyses of the viral advertising phenomenon. Multivariate procedures may be useful in better identifying the nature of viral advertising strategies across industries and in comparison to other online media advertising formats. In addition, future studies ought to further explore the use of Taylor's six-segmented strategy wheel as a model for the analysis of creative strategies. Social networking research are largely based on studying outcomes and not strategies. Focusing on how to gauge the effectiveness of social networking tools, how to integrate the tools into more traditional media mixes and how to improve on each strategy might provide a unique direction to the marketers. Internet marketers could place an increasing amount of emphasis on building communities via social networks and integrate each platform to deliver a constant stream of exposure.

The power of social media marketing cannot be denied. Real-time marketing has become the "it" thing in advertising. It will no doubt be one of the easiest way for companies to launch themselves in the advertisement industry. However, benefiting from it and how remains to be the ideal scenario at the moment.

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