



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

New Buzz in Marketing: Go Viral

Aarti Kadyan

Assistant Professor, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi, India

Chandni Aswal

Assistant Professor, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi, India

Abstract:

In today's technology driven society, the Internet has become one of the most convenient and cost effective method of marketing. One of the most important tools used by the marketers is viral marketing. The rise of the internet, emailing and social networking sites have made viral marketing a cheap and convenient tool for marketers. Viral marketing is a relatively new method in which consumers not only get to watch an advertisement, but also share it with their social network and hence it has the potential to quickly reach larger audiences at lower costs. The purpose of this paper is to study the emerging marketing trends like online word of mouth & viral marketing and explain how effective they are in building brand awareness among the potential consumers and developing consumer responses. This article is a literature review that presents a summary of the findings of all key aspects of viral marketing and how effective it is in consumer decision making process.

Key words: Viral marketing, Word-of-mouth, Social Networking Site, Brand awareness

1. Introduction

Viral marketing is a new and unconventional method of communication used by marketers to make consumers aware of their products with the use of internet, social networking sites. In viral marketing, firms display an attractive and catchy advertisement on the internet which is then shared by the viewers in their social circle and thus the message is spread in an easy, quick and cheaper way than the other traditional marketing methods. Phelps et al. (2004) define viral marketing as “the process of encouraging honest communication among consumer networks. Kissand Bichler (2008) defines viral marketing as “marketing techniques that use social networks to produce increases in brand awareness, through self-replicating viral diffusion of messages, analogous to the spread of pathological and computer viruses”.

Word-of-mouth is an older concept in marketing and it refers to a form of interpersonal communication between consumers regarding their personal experiences with a firm or a product (Richins, 1984). Viral marketing was later evolved from word of mouth. The major difference between the two is the platform on which the message is transferred, viral marketing as it is a digital form of transmitting messages between users, is faster as it can multiply within seconds like a virus. And as mentioned earlier, message by word of mouth is generally a result of a good experience between the consumer and a brand, but in viral marketing a message is a promotional technique used by the marketer to make consumers aware of the brand and its product and induce them into passing the message to other users. The message thus can be transferred in any form images, videos, texts, e-mails, games, newsletters, enabling blogging etc. This is an era in which social networking media like face book, twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube etc., play an important role in helping businesses develop.

Nobody could believe that an extremely ordinary looking guy could overnight become an extraordinary icon . To promote his movie '3', Dhanush , a popular South Indian actor uploaded a video of the song sung by him on YouTube and the very next day the song became a rage not only in South India but in every state across the nation and soon it went viral all over the world. The video was randomly shot in half an hour which with its funny lyrics which today's youth could relate with, now records around 75 million hits on YouTube. The popularity of the song increased the anticipation of the viewers and contributed to the success of the movie. Such is the impact of the viral marketing campaigns when used effectively with innovative content having potential of going viral.

2. Objective of the Study

This study aims to investigate two areas surrounding viral marketing. The first aim is to investigate any possible effect that viral marketing can have in generating brand awareness over the internet. The second aim is to assess the effectiveness of viral marketing in affecting the decision making process of the consumer i.e. how various viral marketing techniques help the consumer in deciding

which brand to buy. This is a literature review paper in which we have used descriptive research approaches to study and analyze the findings of various important research papers, articles and other sources pertaining to our research objectives. In particular this paper provides a theoretical framework regarding the concepts of viral marketing and its effectiveness as a medium of marketing.

3. Viral Marketing Techniques:

In their article "E-marketing excellence", Smith and Chaffey (2005) described the broader classification of various techniques of viral marketing available for businesses to use. E-mail plays a vital part in these techniques as it provides the portal for communication exchange to take place. Every person having a valid e-mail address gets in some form advertisements and promos of various products and firms. Online shopping portals like jabong.com, myntraa.com regularly send to their customers, information regarding new offers and discounts on their products through e-mails. Another technique is web facilitated viral, where a link to 'email a friend' is placed on the company website to gain additional email addresses to use in other marketing campaigns. When you read a newsletter or blog online or any information regarding a firm you have an option to e-mail it to your friend. Brand loyal consumers use this technique and e-mail it to friends if they are satisfied with the products of the firm. A popular viral marketing technique is incentivized viral, where an award or an offer is made available to an individual once they have provided the company with an email address, or addresses of friends or colleagues. When Aakash-the android tablet was launched it came up with a referral scheme wherein a customer can get the tablet free if he gets 15 references with payment of a meagre refundable membership fee. Lastly web-linked viral is also an important viral marketing technique, in which when you search for a product reviews on-line, you can find various links to articles, blogs and chat rooms where the product benefits and defects are discussed. This technique is more like offline word of mouth only in this case it is done online between friends or complete strangers who have used the product and posted reviews online, which assist other consumers in making their decision. There are various consumer forums online, where consumers share their views on the various products they have used.

There are other forms of viral marketing techniques too which are widely used these days in the form of viral marketing campaigns taken up by the firms to promote their brand, products, services, company or anything. These are various free online applications, games, contests, and RSS feeds, attractive videos in the form of advertisements which are funny, captivating and effective in gaining the attention of the users. In present times people are seeking more value of their time and effort. Campaigns that give back certain rewards, incentives or any benefits to the sender of the message have proven to be very effective. It is thus vital for campaigners to be inventive and innovative to gather people's imagination who eventually act as messengers and help sharing of viral messages.

Many marketers use customized conduit toolbars to access the social networking world. These toolbars are designed to incorporate various fun features to be shared among the subscribers. Later these subscribers transform into potential customers at no cost. Similarly, Share widget is an application that gives the visitors the ability to easily share and bookmark any website through popular social network platforms. Other techniques are newsletters, blogs, Pinterest, Face book, Twitter, Press releases, Petitions etc.

Nowadays the most powerful viral marketing tool available over the internet is 'social networking sites'. Internet has been successful in breaking geographical boundaries and to bringing people from different nationalities closer. To remain closer to one another, people have made different virtual communities which they use as a forum to discuss different aspects of their lives like education, lifestyle, relationships, interests, ideas etc. A major part of the users of these sites have started sharing information and reviews about the products they have used. Just type the name of any product on the search engine and you will find various links to the forums on which both the satisfied and dissatisfied consumers have shared their experiences and opinions about the product. Today, the consumers have become more interested in accumulating as much information about the product as possible before buying it. Emergence of the internet has made it easier for the consumers to collect the information, opinions and reviews about the product from various on-line sources. This has made the market customer driven.

4. Why Do People Share Messages?

Today's generation is widely techno-savvy which aspires to look cooler and smarter in its social circle. They share messages which are funny, quirky and engaging. The most memorable Old spice campaign "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" was a big viral hit, The brand uploaded 185 videos to YouTube in two days, receiving comments on various social networks and responding with the same idiosyncrasies displayed in the commercials. What made this video go viral in such a memorable fashion? The campaign featured a rugged handsome man who with his incongruous and nonsensical humor caught the attention of the audience. A marketer cannot create a viral message he can just use original innovative content, share it with the audience and hope it goes viral. It is the audience who decide which content is worth going viral. The messages that are positive, quirky, awe inspiring, empathetic, a message that touches them deeply are more likely to engage people and make them share it with their family and friends. Big Cinemas in association with the mudra group came up with an invigorating concept that stimulated a feeling of nationalism in the viewers 'The wordless Indian National Anthem' left every viewer speechless with goose bumps and got shared everywhere on the internet. When it comes to movies the trailers launched few weeks prior to the release of the movie create anticipation in the minds of the viewers. The movie marketers spend millions in marketing the movie when nearing the date of release to ensure blockbuster opening of the movie as it has been seen that in case of movies negative word of mouth spreads so quickly declining the sale of movie tickets in the following weeks. The trailer of "Twilight Saga- Breaking Dawn Part 1 received around 170 million views contributing highly to its success. The movie Blair Witch Project released in 1999 grossed over \$250 million worldwide. Its implausible success was due to its innovative idea of creating a website that obscured the lines between reality and imagination. The website spoke of the story of the three filmmakers who disappeared showing real photos of them taken less than a week before their disappearance making the site look

real which terrified the audience and their curiosity led to the success of the movie. People started talking about the movie all over social networking sites giving it more hype.

5. Viral Marketing Campaigns

According to Helm (2000), the primary aim of viral marketing is maximizing reach of campaign to as many viewers as possible. There are varied opinions about the success rate of viral marketing campaigns on the effectiveness they have in luring the consumers to buy a product. For making a successful viral marketing campaign it is important to create a message which viewers like and are induced to share it to others. Hotmail's idea of inviting the recipients of each mail sent by Hotmail users, to join the network was the earliest example of viral marketing over the internet which effectively increases the number of Hotmail users. In December 1996 Hotmail had 500,000 registered users – less than a year later they had over 12,000,000 users. This astonishing growth rate was down to the fact that every single email sent from Hotmail included a small advert promoting the service in the footer. (<http://www.branded3.com/blogs/the-top-10-viral-marketing-campaigns-of-all-time/>)

The most memorable viral marketing campaigns of all time is Old Spice Man Responses which witnessed Isaiah Mustafa's brilliant portrayal of The Man Your Man Could Smell Like, Old Spice brought the character to the social world with Old Spice Man Responses. The brand uploaded 185 videos to YouTube over the course of two days, responding to comments on various social networks with the same quirky wit featured in the commercials. (<http://www.ignitesocialmedia.com>) It helped Procter & Gamble amass over 40 million views on YouTube and enjoy a 107% increase in body wash sales within 30 days of the campaign launch.

The campaign "MAD MAN YOURSELF" launched by AMC before the launch of the third season of Mad Men, in which the users could use an avatar creator which allowed them to make a stylized '60s version avatar. The site received half a million visitors in the first week and the season 3 premier saw record ratings. This campaign is still popular as its receiving updates with every new season even after five years. In 2004 Burger king launched its campaign Subservient Chicken which in its first week racked up 46 million views. (<http://www.branded3.com/blogs/the-top-10-viral-marketing-campaigns-of-all-time/>)

Coke Zero: Unlock The 007 In You- Wanting to recreate the excitement and high-octane feel of the James Bond movies, Coke Zero got unsuspecting commuters to rush to platform 6 in 70 seconds to win tickets to see Skyfall (<http://www.simplyzesty.com/Blog/Article/December-2012/The-50-Best-Viral-Campaigns-Of-2012#sthash.NP5LeZfQ.dpuf>)

TheDove's Real Beauty sketches campaign accumulated around 30 million views in about 10 days. In two months more than 15000 YouTube subscribers were added to Dove's account with significant increase in their facebook and twitter followers.

There are millions of viral videos, images, messages created every year. Some of which are really funny and memorable; that's what makes it go viral. One, you're not embarrassed to share any of these on social media sites. And two, they may make you very popular with your friends. These are things people will talk about for days. These viral marketing campaigns trigger certain emotions in the viewers like amazement, interest, awe, anger, joy, lust, uncertainty, anxiety, curiosity, anticipation etc. These emotions help them relate to the campaign and the brand associated with the campaign but there is no direct research found which can be related to effectiveness of viral marketing in inducing consumers to actually make the purchase. Certain brands have seen increase in sales in the quarter of the year they launched their viral campaign and certain brands have only seen increase in the number of online Facebook, YouTube and Twitter followers. It is clear from the above examples that well-made viral campaigns help the companies make the consumers aware of their brands and it also increases the popularity of the brands and its products.

6. How Is Consumer Behavior Affected By VMC's

To start with lets discuss why is the study of consumer behaviour important for marketing decisions, the purpose is to enable firms design and improve their marketing strategies by understanding individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society (Hawkins, Best et al. 2004). One of the most important aspects of consumer behaviour studied by firms is consumer decision making process. Consumers normally follow a trend according to the environment to which they belong and which affects their decision making process. Consumer choice depends on two things, consumer preferences and the set of feasible alternatives. The most important objective of the business firms is to convince the consumers to purchase their products and all the marketing decisions taken by the consumers revolve around the attainment of this primary objective of the companies.

The impact of viral marketing is different in each stage of consumer decision making process. According to Kotler et al (2005), there are 5 stages in the consumer decision making process, the first stage is the problem recognition stage in which consumer recognizes a need and wants to satisfy the need consumers finds various alternatives to satisfy his needs, and makes a list of available options but they lack information about various benefits associated with each alternative. Viral marketers can present potential consumers with initial basic knowledge about the brand and its product. Second stage is Information search stage of consumer decision making process in which consumers are now aware of alternatives available to them information about various brands and their products, and they have decided to gain more information about them. Viral marketers here can help consumers gain more information about the brand, products and utility of the product through viral messages. Third stage in consumer decision making process is the evaluation of alternatives stage in which consumers separately evaluate each alternative available to them and after evaluation decide which product to purchase. In this stage viral marketers can through their messages show positive comments from previous users of the product. In fourth stage of consumer decision making process consumers make the actual purchase. After making the purchase consumers go through the final stage of post-purchase evaluation where they form opinion about the product after using it in this stage

messages of satisfied consumers are to be used in the viral marketing campaign to further promote the business. Therefore viral marketing if effectively used can have a great impact on consumer decision making process.

7. Findings and Recommendations

Viral marketing may not be always successful but if the marketer is able to attract the audience with a funny, memorable and provocative campaign which can spark a firestorm in the minds of the audience then it is possible that the product gets registered in the minds of the consumers for a very long period of time. Various studies suggest that viral marketing helps companies to make consumer aware of the products and their benefits. Monetary incentives motivate consumers to spread messages but the most powerful motivator is the content of the message.

A viral message can make or break the brand image of a company. So the marketers have to be careful about the content of the viral message. It is found that consumers rely more on blogs for their purchase decisions as they consider bloggers as opinion leaders. Consumers now want to be more involved in the buying process, so to gain more information and evidence of the positive results of the product they turn to the internet. It will be a good idea for the companies to start their own blogs where consumers can share their experiences, complaints, and give recommendations for the improvement of the product. This could help companies get instant feedbacks about the product and help consumers know more about the product. It is essential for the businesses to effectively target consumers before generating a viral campaign because viewers spread only those messages which they can relate themselves to. It is also found that viral marketing is still not used effectively on the internet that is why businesses are not able to reap enough benefits out of their campaigns. Effective targeting of users will help company generate more sales. The effect of targeting right consumers can be known from an example a friend of ours bought a jacket from an online store because she saw her friend (whom she considers to be of a good social status and has a good sense of clothing) promote the store on face book. There are so many people who buy a product when they see their friends, who influence them positively, promote the brand in various communities on the social networking sites.

8. Conclusion

Viral marketing is comparatively a new concept in the domain of marketing. Many researchers conclude that viral messages do not have much positive effects on the consumers buying act but to they help consumers register the brand name in their minds. Viral messages do help create need for certain product and services in the consumers. This need might influence them to buy the product. Consumers forward viral messages to people known to them and listen to satisfied and dissatisfied consumers before deciding to buy a product. For a viral message to be successful it should be funny, quirky, something which the consumer can relate to. The marketer needs to be innovative by using different effects to the advertisement or do anything which creates a wow effect in the minds of the viewers. The business environment is fast-changing and social media has a very large impact on the minds of the consumer and using effective viral marketing campaigns can be the best bet for the marketers in the time to come. So it is very important for the companies to keep themselves updated about the new technologies being used and adapt the changes to gain from their advantages.

9. References

1. Hawkins, D. I., R. J. Best, et al. (2004). *Consumer behaviour: building marketing strategy*. Boston, McGraw-Hill Irwin
2. Helm, S. (2000). Viral marketing - Establishing customer relationships by 'word-of-mouth'. *Electronic Commerce and Marketing*, 10(3), 158-161
3. Kiss, C., & Bichler, M. (2008). Identification of Influencers – Measuring Influence in Customer Networks. *Decision Support Systems*, 46(1), 233-253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2008.06.007>
4. Kotler, P., Wrong, V., Saunders, J., Armstrong, G. (2005) *Principles of Marketing*.
5. 4th edition. Edinburgh: Prentice Hall
6. Phelps, J. E., Lewis, R., Mobilio, L., Perry, D., & Raman, N. (2004). Viral Marketing or Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising: Examining Consumer Responses and Motivations to Pass Along Email. *Journal of Advertising Research*,
7. 44(4), 333-348
8. Richins, M. L. (1983). "Negative Word-of-Mouth by Dissatisfied Consumers - a Pilot-Study." *Journal of Marketing* 47(1): 68-78.
9. Smith, P.R and Chaffey, D. (2005) *E-marketing excellence*, 2nd Ed, Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann
10. <http://www.ignitesocialmedia.com/social-media-examples/15-viral-marketing-examples-campaigns-past-5-years/>
11. <http://www.simplyzesty.com/Blog/Article/December-2012/The-50-Best-Viral-Campaigns-Of-2012#sthash.NP5LeZfQ.dpuf>
12. (<http://www.branded3.com/blogs/the-top-10-viral-marketing-campaigns-of-all-time/>)