

A Study on Factors affecting the Exposure to Viral Marketing Messages

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Abstract

Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions. The study identifies the Factors affecting the exposure to Viral Marketing Messages. A literature review is done to gain understanding of the subject followed by a focus group to refine the understandings. A questionnaire is prepared based on the basis of the understandings from literature review and focus group, administered and interpreted to identify the Factors affecting the exposure to Viral Marketing Message. A Factor analysis revealed 'Peer Group Influence', 'Access Method', 'Source factors' and 'tempo spatial factors' as those that affecting the exposure to Viral Marketing Message. Peer Group Influence means that WOM from peer group, Source factors are the factors attached to the originator and passer of the message, Access Method includes the access methods to get exposed to the message whereas tempo spatial factors are associated with the time and space of where the respondent is.

Keywords

Peer Group Influence, Access Method, Source Effect, Tempo Spatial Factors, Viral Marketing Message

I. Introduction

Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions.

Viral marketing depends on a high pass-along rate from person to person. If a large percentage of recipients forward something to a large number of friends, the overall growth snowballs very quickly. If the pass-along numbers get too low, the overall growth quickly fizzles.

An effective viral marketing strategy:

1. Gives away products or services
2. Provides for effortless transfer to others
3. Scales easily from small to very large
4. Exploits common motivations and behaviours
5. Utilizes existing communication networks
6. Takes advantage of others' resources

II. Literature Review

The purpose of the paper 'Word of Mouth and Viral Marketing: taking the temperature of the hottest trends in marketing' by Rick Ferguson, Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 25, Nov 3, 2008, 179-182 was to study examples of emerging marketing trends like Word of Mouth and Viral Marketing and attempt to determine their measurability in terms of ROI. The study examines real life campaigns from well known companies and attempt to measure consumer response beyond merely viewing or participating

in the campaign. The paper finds that Word of Mouth or Viral Marketing efforts are not always a sure bet. But a well placed, calculated and provocative campaign can spark a firestorm of buzz that sometimes can be effective for years in non terminal new mediums like the internet. Phelps et al., in their paper 'Viral Marketing or Electronic Word of Mouth Advertising: Examining Consumer Responses and Motivations to Pass Along Email', Journal of Advertising Research, Dec 2004, 333-348 provided a better understanding of the motivation and behaviour of those who pass along email messages. First, focus groups helped identify and assess participants' rational and emotional connections with both pass along email and with senders, as well as the reactions pass along email evoke. A content analysis of these messages provided an in depth examination of participants' actual pass along email behaviour. Finally, in depth interviews with the participants provided communication motivation data to better understand these potentially viral consumers. The examination of pass along email receipt and sending patterns revealed 4 separate pass along email profiles, Cell 1 includes those who neither received many pass along emails nor forwarded many of those they received. Cell 2 includes those who received few such emails, but forwarded many messages. Cell 3 represents those who received many messages and forwarded many messages. Cell 4 represents those who receives many messages, but passed on virtually none. Their study illustrates the importance of selecting the initial target. Individuals in the focus group revealed that they did not consider information 'junk' if it came from a person that they know.

Bruyn and Lilien in their paper 'A multi stage model of word-of mouth influences through Viral Marketing' International Journal of Research in Marketing, Vol. 25, (2008), 151-163 developed a model to help identify the role word of mouth plays during each stage of a viral marketing recipients' decision-making process. They empirically test the model and methodology via a field study, where they observes the reactions of 1100 individuals after they received an unsolicited email from 1 of their acquaintances inviting them to take a survey and turn spread the word about it. They found that characteristics of the social tie influenced represents behaviours, but had different effects at different stages; tie strength facilitated awareness, perceptual affinity triggered recipients' intent and demographic similarity had a negative influence on each stage of the decision making process.

Dietmar in his paper 'Exploring the concept of Mobile Viral Marketing through Case Study Research' tried to represent the first step in filling the void between communication and distribution via mobile viral marketing. He examines 34 case studies in order to identify relevant characteristics of mobile viral marketing. The outcome of this paper was a description model of mobile viral marketing as well as a derivative of 4 mobile viral marketing standard types. The proposed scheme allows unambiguously characterising any given mobile viral marketing strategy and promoting recommendations for designing new mobile viral strategies.

Bampo et al., in their paper 'The effects of the Social Structure of

Digital Networks on Viral Marketing Performance', Information System Research 19(3), pp. 273-290, (2008) deconstruct the conventional wisdom that Viral Marketing is both random and unmanageable and investigate the promotion of the activated digital network as distinct from the underlying social network. They then considered the impact of the social structure of digital networks and of the transmission behaviour of individuals on campaign performance. Specifically, we identify alternative social network models to understand the moderating effects of the social structures of these models on Viral Marketing campaigns. Next, they analysed an actual Viral Marketing campaign and used the empirical data to develop and validate a computer simulation model for Viral Marketing. Finally, they conducted a number of simulation experiments to predict the scenarios. One finding confirms that the social structure of digital networks play a critical role in the spread of viral message. Managers seeking to optimise campaign performance should give consideration to these findings before designing and implementing Viral Marketing campaigns. They also demonstrate how a simulation model is used to quantify the impact of campaign management inputs and how the learnings can support managerial decision making.

Woerndl et al., in their paper 'Internet-Induced Marketing techniques: Critical factors in Viral Marketing campaigns', International Journal of Business Science and Applied Management, Vol 3, Issue 1, 2008 identified critical factors for Viral Marketing, an internet based 'Word of Mouth' marketing technique. Based on the existing knowledge, 5 types of viral marketing factors that may critically influence the success of viral marketing campaigns were identified. These factors were the overall structure of the campaign, the characteristics of the product/service, the content of the message, the characteristics of the diffusion and the peer to peer information conduit. The paper discusses 3 examples of Viral Marketing campaigns and identifies the specific factors in each case that influences its success. The paper concludes with a Viral Marketing typology, differentiating between Viral Marketing communication, unintended Viral Marketing and commercial viral marketing

III. Research Methodology

A literature review about viral marketing was done to gain the knowledge about the theoretical aspect of the subject. A focus group was done to identify the Factors affecting the exposure to Viral Marketing Message. Next a questionnaire was prepared on the identified dimensions through focus group. The questionnaire used a five point likert scale. A preliminary study on 30 respondents were collected the hence the sample size for the main study was found to be 120 from the standard deviation of preliminary study.

IV. Focus Group Interview

The focus group consisted of 7 participants and the topic of discussion was Viral Marketing. Spaces such as Face book, Twitter, etc are some of the means of viral marketing. The number of people involved in cyber space is very high and hence, it is very important for a message to spread. But the irony in the previous sentence is that this method of viral marketing is effective only to a certain extent and only if it is from a known source. Some people were of the view that viral marketing happens only because people wanted to stay connected with the rest of the world and to create an image that they are in trend and are updated about everything that is happening around them. According to these people, getting involved in viral marketing sets a social status in

society as they are associated with a lot of 'events' and 'groups' on these websites. Viral marketing also happens through mobiles which are more effective and more personalised. An interesting view which emerged from this is that, if a message was received from an unknown number on the cell phone, it built in more curiosity and was a 'feel good' factor for the receiver, which was not the case in social networking sites. Messages from unknown numbers on cell phones increased a person's esteem. About 70% of the people believe that these messages which are displayed as their status are generally not true. This is because, some people interact even with strangers and they know that the interaction will end at that level. Hence they would not mind lying about their personal information if it is going to help them in anyway. It's a place where people share their interests, which will also create word of mouth communication and help them with job opportunities, find soul mates, etc.

Getting into how effective viral marketing is and how it is evaluated. In case of social networking sites, the number of 'likes' and 'dislikes' or the 'comments' an updated message gets is a method of evaluation. Irrespective of this, every person gets a notification about this message but whether this message changes into action is an important driving point. Viral marketing is more effective through mobile phones than social websites as the source is known in mobiles and hence the message has more credibility. But the type of mobile used and the features available on that phone also matters. The viewership is also more in case of cell phones because if the captions or the first image of the message video is not very interesting or attractive, the audience may not even view it, let alone the message being spread. If it's a social message or a video or message from an established brand/company, the viewership is more and hence word of mouth communication would also be more. The snapshot of the video or message also generates curiosity. Sometimes negative word of mouth communication also works. This scenario is common for actors and does not work for products or services. Word of mouth communication generally causes distortion of the message. The number or kind of celebrities who have an opinion of the brand or the company also influences the degree to which a message spreads. The number of new options available on the net has also increased viral marketing.

V. Data Analysis

Observation of the kurtosis and skewness revealed that none of the measurement items' kurtosis and skewness is more than 10 and 3 points respectively, and thereby confirms to the assumptions of normality.

The validity of the instrument was established by taking expert opinion on the questions framed and asking a test sample if they could comprehend the questions in the questionnaire. The reliability was checked through Cronbach's alpha value for the questionnaire which was found to be .89 which is greater than .7 hence the questionnaire was reliable.

Factor analysis was conducted for the responses using principal component method and varimax rotation for rotation of the axis. The KMO is found to be 0.75, which is above the required value of 0.5, hence this sample is adequate for further factor analysis. The total variance explained is 65.83% and the rotated component matrix shows four factors. One factor which can be called as 'Peer Group Influence' (Q1,Q3,Q13,Q16,Q21,Q23 and Q28), 'Access Method' (Q2,Q6,Q7,Q12,Q14,Q17,Q19,Q24), 'Source factors' (Q4,Q5,Q9,Q11,Q18,Q22,Q26,Q29,Q30) and 'tempo spatial factors' (Q8,Q10,Q15,Q20,Q25,Q27,Q31)

VI. Conclusion

The factors identified have an impact on exposure to Viral Marketing Message. Peer Group Influence indicates the impact that WOM communication can have on Viral Marketing message, Access Method indicates that how that message can be accessed i.e. the devices and gadgets with which the message can be accessed, Source Effect Credits the source of the message to have an impact on the exposure of an individual to a message whereas tempo Spatial factors dictate that the time and space of the receptor to be as a significant factor. These findings pave way for a marketer to plan a viral marketing message strategy considering these factors and hence increasing the chance of people getting exposed to the message.

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Appendix
Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions					
Questions					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree/Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My exposure to a viral message is based on my friend's recommendation					
My exposure to a viral message is based on my past experience with the medium					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the discussions with my friend circle					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the discussions in my friend circle					
My exposure to a viral message is based on Celebrity involved in message					
My exposure to a viral message is based on Celebrity recommendation					
My exposure to a viral message is based on latest News content					
I check viral messages to be updated on latest content					
My exposure to a viral message is based based on my accessing device(Viz Mobile,PC etc)					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the size of the file.					

My exposure to a viral message is based on my data plan					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the snapshot of message					
My exposure to a viral message depends on my mood					
My exposure to a viral message depends on the knowledge of sender					
My exposure to a viral message depends if i am travelling					
My exposure to a viral message depends if i can view it on my Ipad					
My exposure to a viral message is based on comments by my friends					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the place i am in.					
My exposure to a viral message is because everyone else does so					
I check viral messages on mobile based on the sender					
My exposure to a viral message depends if i can view it on my mobile					
My exposure to a viral message depends if i am doing important work					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the likes or dislikes by others					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the originator of the message					
My exposure to a viral message is based on the pass along rate					
My exposure to a viral message depends if i can view it on my Laptop					
My exposure to a viral message depends if i have leisure time					
My exposure to a viral message depends if i trust the sender					
My exposure to a viral message depends if its day time					
My exposure to a viral message depends if its night time					

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.899	31

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.75							
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	296.833							
	Df	15							
	Sig.	0							

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.336	39.795	39.795	12.336	39.795	39.795	6.548	21.122	21.122
2	3.428	11.058	50.853	3.428	11.058	50.853	5.599	18.060	39.182
3	2.960	9.549	60.402	2.960	9.549	60.402	4.434	14.303	53.485
4	1.683	5.429	65.831	1.683	5.429	65.831	3.827	12.346	65.831
5	1.372	4.427	70.257						
6	1.228	3.960	74.217						
7	1.087	3.506	77.723						
8	.973	3.139	80.862						
.791	2.553	83.415							
.695	2.243	85.658							
.587	1.893	87.551							
12	.550	1.775	89.326						
13	.479	1.546	90.872						
14	.425	1.372	92.244						
15	.355	1.146	93.390						
16	.326	1.052	94.442						
17	.268	.864	95.306						
18	.219	.707	96.013						
19	.200	.645	96.658						
20	.189	.611	97.269						
21	.175	.563	97.832						
22	.133	.429	98.261						
23	.116	.375	98.637						
24	.101	.325	98.962						
25	.086	.279	99.241						
26	.080	.258	99.499						
27	.067	.215	99.713						
28	.042	.136	99.849						
29	.033	.108	99.957						
30	.010	.031	99.988						
31	.004	.012	100.000						

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix		Component			
		1	2	3	4
Q.1.	My exposure to a viral message is based on my friend's recommendation	0.879			
Q.2.	My exposure to a viral message is based on my past experience with the medium		0.739		
Q.3.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the discussions with my friend circle	0.814			
Q.4.	My exposure to a viral message is based on Celebrity involved in message			0.842	
Q.5.	My exposure to a viral message is based on latest News content			0.653	
Q.6.	My exposure to a viral message is based based on my accessing device(Viz Mobile,PC etc)		0.583		
Q.7.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the snapshot of message		0.774		
Q.8.	My exposure to a viral message depends on my mood				0.786
Q.9.	My exposure to a viral message depends on the knowledge of sender			0.765	
Q.10.	My exposure to a viral message depends if i am travelling				0.567
Q.11.	I check viral messages on mobile based of the sender			0.877	
Q.12.	My exposure to a viral message depends if i can view it on my Ipad		0.811		
Q.13.	My exposure to a viral message is based on comments by my friends	0.888			
Q.14.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the size of the file.		0.741		
Q.15.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the place i am in.				0.878
Q.16.	My exposure to a viral message is because everyone else does so	0.755			
Q.17.	My exposure to a viral message is based on my data plan		0.665		
Q.18.	My exposure to a viral message depends on the knowledge of sender			0.878	
Q.19.	My exposure to a viral message depends if i can view it on my mobile		0.534		
Q.20.	My exposure to a viral message depends if i am doing important work				0.738
Q.21.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the likes or dislikes by others	0.642			
Q.22.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the originator of the message			0.751	
Q.23.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the pass along rate	0.869			
Q.24.	My exposure to a viral message depends if i can view it on my Laptop		0.895		
Q.25.	My exposure to a viral message depends if i have leisure time				0.555
Q.26.	My exposure to a viral message depends if i trust the sender			0.763	

Q.27.	My exposure to a viral message depends if its night time				0.747
Q.28.	My exposure to a viral message is based on the discussions in my friend circle	0.852			
Q.29.	My exposure to a viral message is based on Celebrity recommendation			0.871	
Q.30.	I check viral messages to be updated on latest content			0.566	
Q.31.	My exposure to a viral message depends if its day time				0.785



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