

Analysis of Shares and Likes on Facebook: Crafting Effective Viral Marketing Campaigns

JEAN PAOLO G. LACAP

Angeles University Foundation
Chair, Management and Entrepreneurship Department
Angeles City, Philippines

Abstract:

The advent of the World Wide Web gave rise to online advertisements and promotions, the modern marketing strategies being utilized by marketing professionals and experts. The arrival of the Internet gave birth to new species of e-marketers. Strapping up the greatest power of viral marketing can really bring huge success on organizations. It is not surprising that the number of social media users provide a vehicle for socialization on the web. With this, it is very essential for marketers to measure these buzzes brought about by viral marketing campaigns on social media. Thus, the research highlights the importance of viral marketing campaigns on Facebook and how the users become indirect viral marketers of the different brands/products/businesses. The research utilized both descriptive and exploratory research and used judgmental or purposive sampling technique to identify the participants of the study. The undertaking revealed that viral marketing can be a powerful selling tool. This was evident with the outcome of the total number of shares and likes of categories and at the same time the number of friends who shared and liked these categories.

Key words: Viral marketing, Facebook, marketing campaigns, World Wide Web, online advertisements and promotions

1. Introduction

Placing advertisements and promotions online is one of the modern marketing strategies being utilized by marketing managers and experts. The rise of the Internet gave birth to new species of e-marketers. The change in the landscape or attention shift of consumers from traditional trimedia – print, radio, and television – to social media becomes an exigent task for marketing professionals. As the number of online users increases particularly social networking sites users, the greater the challenge being faced by marketing people.

Viral marketing is one of the hottest issues in the world of e-marketing. It is all about web generation, messages on e-mails, or any marketing experience that is very contagious that customers will pass it along to their colleagues or to their friends (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007). It is also defined as a marketing campaign that enables social media users to share a marketing message to other individuals crafting the possibility of growth exponentially in the contact and power of the said message. Analogous to viruses, the marketing campaigns can multiply to as big as to millions (Wilson, 2012). The very essence of viral marketing is the fact that social media users pass the campaign to others and e-marketers take advantage of this because it is inexpensive. Fundamentally, any information from a closed colleague or friend, the receiver is more likely in opening and reading the message. In the context of Snyder (2004), viral marketing is essentially about getting customers and they will do the marketing for the brand/products/businesses.

The rise in consumers' resistance to traditional advertising forms, marketers have turned to alternative strategies including viral marketing (Leskovec, 2007). Viral marketing utilizes existing social networking sites by encouraging customers to share product information with their friends. In the Philippines, the number of Facebook (a well-

known social networking site) users as of December 31, 2012 was 29,890,900 at 28.8% penetration rate. The numbers of Internet users in the Philippines in 2013 was 33 million ((Internet World Stats, 2014). The Philippines has also the fastest growing Internet users in the globe experiencing 531 percent growth in the last half a decade according to The Global Web Index as cited in techinsia.com (2014). With these figures of Facebook and Internet users, marketers should strive to produce viral marketing campaigns that would generate viral effect to these consumers thus gaining positive return through profitability.

2. Related Literatures

A few thorough researches have shown that social networks affect the adoption of individual innovations and products (Rogers, 1995; Strang & Soule, 1998). But until recently it has been difficult to measure how influential peer-to-peer recommendations actually are over a wide array of products and services. According to Subramani and Rajagopalan (2003), “there needs to be a greater understanding of the contexts in which viral marketing strategy works and the characteristics of products and services for which it is most effective. This is particularly important because the inappropriate use of viral marketing can be counterproductive by creating unfavourable attitudes towards products. What is missing is an analysis of viral marketing that highlights systematic patterns in the nature of knowledge-sharing and persuasion by influencers and responses by recipients in online social networks.”

Gil-Or (2010) investigated viral marketing in Facebook and analysed the possibility of generating demand. The result of the study revealed a strong viral effect of the message and was generally reactively distributed among respondent-Facebook members. Ho and Dempsey (2010) further studied the motivations of Internet users to pass along online contents and

the frequency of passing these contents. The result showed that, those who are more individualistic and/or more altruistic tend to forward online content compared to other users. Moreover, Chu (2013) explored the link of Facebook group participation with viral advertising responses. The results of the study suggested that college-aged Facebook group members engage in higher levels of self-disclosure and maintain more favourable attitudes toward social media and advertising in general than do non-group members. The author further asserted that Facebook group participation does not exert an influence on viral advertising pass-on behaviours of users.

Alhabash et al (2013) examined the effects of emotional appeal and message virality of Facebook status updates. Using status updates for a fictitious anti-cyber bullying organization through mixed factorial experiment, the results indicated that positive messages showed more positive evaluation and stronger anti-cyberbullying attitudes and viral behaviour intentions. Moreover the authors mentioned that low message virality lead to the most favourable message evaluations while high message virality resulted in stronger anti-bullying attitudes. In contrast, Wallace et al (2012) investigated two (2) the relationship between homophily and social ties, and the extent to which strong ties are associated with users of Facebook incorporation of self-expressive brands in their personal profiles by 'liking' them. The results revealed that stronger social ties influence consumers' propensity to 'like' brands that express their inner and social selves. In further asserted that brands that are self-expressive shoe positive word-of-mouth (WOM) on social networks. Additionally, self-expressive 'liked' on Facebook directly influence brand acceptance of consumers and their willingness to forego 'liked' brands for wrongdoing.

The researches presented clearly show that viral marketing particularly in social networking sites are important components of modern marketing advertising and promotion

thus, the researcher further augmented the level of understanding of this marketing concept and at the latter part of this study proposed several viral marketing strategies that can increase the level of visibility of different brands or products among social networkers hence contribute to the prosperity of the firm.

3. Paradigm of the Study

In the research paradigm in Figure 1, Facebook users was evaluated and analysed based on the marketing campaigns of different brands/products/businesses. An analysis of the number of likes and shares determined how they indirectly became viral marketers of different brands/products/businesses. In the final scrutiny, viral marketing campaigns were formulated to strengthen the research under study.

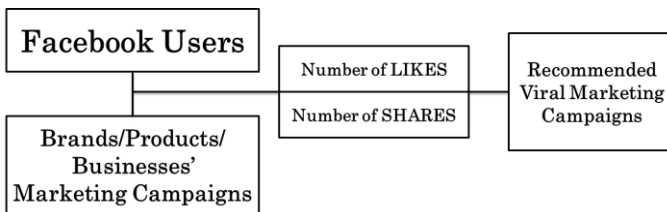


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

The study can provide useful information to advertisers and marketers. As the number of social networking sites users increases every year, the idea of putting an effective viral marketing campaign can be a potent tool to influence consumer decision with their purchases. Communication strategists who utilize viral marketing as a tool for creating and maintaining online communities will also benefit from the study. The information gained from Facebook users of various brands/products/businesses is vital for the formulation effective viral marketing campaign on social media. And lastly, the researcher learned that no local research was done in the

Philippines, future researchers would greatly benefit from the undertaking.

4. Method

A descriptive method was used in the study. According to Kumar (2005), a descriptive research attempts to describe systematically a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program, provides information or describes attitudes towards an issue. Since there is little is known in the study, an exploratory was also utilized. An exploratory research is used when a study is undertaken with the objective either to explore an area where little is known or to investigate the possibilities of undertaking a particular research study (Kumar, 2005). All data were gathered through observations made by the researcher. Specifically a non-participant observation was made to scrutinize the behaviour of Facebook users on how they become (indirectly) viral marketers of certain products/brands/companies.

4.1. Participants

The study was conducted by observing Facebook users specifically friends of a certain Facebook user. Observation is a purposeful, systematic, and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place. The researcher particularly utilized a non-participative observation where he was not involved in the activities of the group and remained as a passive observer. Since the researcher is more interested in the behaviour than in the perceptions of individuals, observation is the best approach to collect the required information (Kumar, 2005).

In terms of sampling design, a judgmental or purposive sampling was used. The primary consideration in purposive sampling is the judgment of the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the

study (Kumar, 2005). Since an exploratory research was the type of research utilized, this judgmental or purposive sampling was very much attuned.

Thirty one (31) friends of a certain Facebook user were the participants of the study. Out of the 31 participants, 11 or 35.48% were female and 20 or 64.52% were male. These 31 participants were observed based on how they become indirect viral marketers of different brands/products/businesses. The information gathered was taken from the whole month of January 2012. Because of the intricacy, constraints, and limitations of the researcher in gathering data on Facebook, only 31 participants were gathered. According to the published online article of “The Economist,” last February 2009, the average number of friends in Facebook was 120. This figure was taken from the “in-house sociologist” of Facebook, Cameron Marlow (The Economist website, 2012). With this average number of friends, 31 as the number of participants was enough to explore the effects of viral marketing on Facebook.

4.2. Measures

Since a non-participative observation was utilized, the participants were observed on how they become indirect viral marketers on Facebook of different brands/products/businesses. They were observed based on how they share a certain brand/product/business on their Facebook wall posts. From that, the researcher counted the number of likes and shares of that brand/product/business. The number of likes and shares measured the likeliness of the participants to be indirect viral marketers and at the same time how the brand/product/business went viral on Facebook. Frequency and percentage distribution was used to describe and explore the impact of viral marketing on Facebook. Mean score was also utilized to show the average shares and likes of the different categories presented in the study.

5. Results

Table 1 summarizes the total number and the mean (average) shares and likes of different brands/products/businesses based on the non-participative observation done by the researcher.

Table 1: Total Number and the Mean (Average) Shares and Likes

Categories	Total Number of Shares	Mean Shares	Total Number of Likes	Mean Likes
Brands of Shoes	17	4.25	13	3.25
Airlines	29	5.67	17	5.67
TV Show/Program	1122	224.4	775	155
Newspaper	3	3	2	2
TV Network	1	1	2	2
Campaign/Ad	2	2	1	1
Political Personality	12	12	25	25
Brands of Cell phones	199	99.5	7	3.5
Movies	24	4.8	16	3.2
Music Video	10	5	22	11
Beverage	6	3	11	5.5
Magazine	11	3.67	92	30.67
Celebrity	6	3	168	84
Photography Business	1	1	20	20
Fast food	3	3	3	3
Coffee shop/Teashop	5	2.5	10	5
Clothing Brand	6	6	3	3
Hotel	1	1	8	8
Tourist Destination	1	1	10	10
Music Channel	2	2	2	2

Among the different categories, TV program/show had the highest total number of shares amounting to 1122 with a mean score of 224.4 while TV network, photography business, hotel, and tourist destination had the least share and mean share of only 1. In terms of the total number likes, TV program/show had the highest still, having 775 with a mean score of 155. On the other hand, campaign/ad had only 1 like.

Moreover, figure 2 shows the number of friends who shared and liked the different categories.

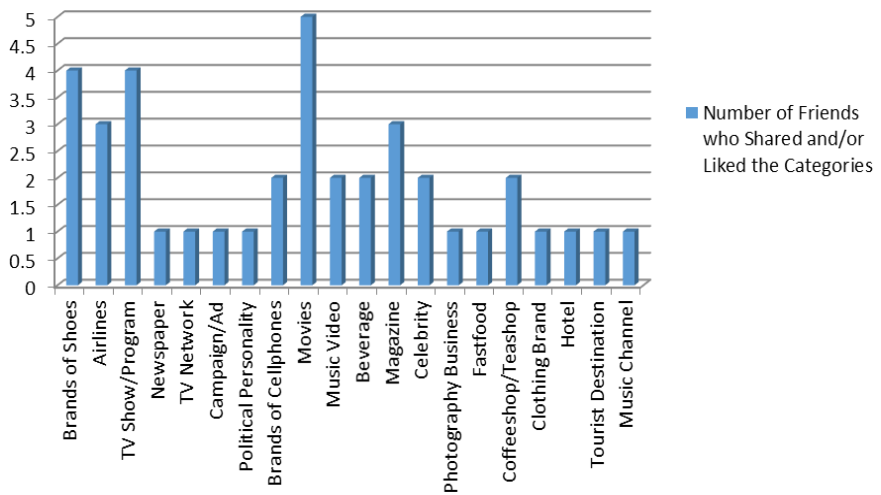


Figure 2: The Number of Friends who Shared and Liked the Different Categories

Among the different categories, 5 friends shared and liked movies. It was followed by brands of shoes and TV show/program having 4. Airlines and magazine had 3 friends who shared and liked these categories and lastly, brands of cell phones, music video, beverage, celebrity, and coffee shop/teashop had 2. All the mentioned categories were the top categories in terms of the number of friends who shared and liked the brand/product/business.

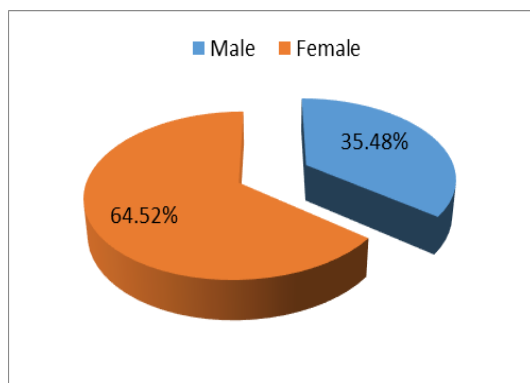


Figure 3: Number of Participants

Figure 3 manifests the number of participants of the study. Out of the 31 participants, 11 or 35.48% were female and 20 or 64.52% were male. These 31 participants were observed based on how they become indirect viral marketers of different brands/products/businesses.

6. Discussions and Conclusions

The growing number of social networking sites users is spending most of their time and attention on Facebook and less on other channels and media. Most marketers lack a comprehensive understanding of the vast array of explicit and implicit marketing channels Facebook offers (Smith, 2009). This study aimed at maximizing the power of marketing campaigns on Facebook specifically the power of viral marketing. The results of the undertaking revealed that viral marketing can be a powerful selling tool. This was evident with the outcome of the total number of shares and likes of categories and at the same time the number of friends who shared and liked these categories. Some products/brands incurred minimum shares and likes while others obtained high number of shares and likes. The high degree of shares and likes means high level or viral effects to the brand/product. Thus, it is vital for any business or enterprise to carefully analyse and manage the online behaviour of social media users since they care critical in the success of online marketing advertising and promotion campaigns.

To maximize the power Internet advertisements and promotions on the social media, it should be anchored by viral marketing campaigns that are both responsive and doable.

7. Recommendations

The researcher recommends that companies should learn to listen and track the frequency and behaviour of social

networking sites users through share rate (the percentage of users who will share the campaign), like rate (the rate of how many will click the like button on the campaign), and possibly comment rate (the number of comments made by users on a specific campaign). Interact with them and provide mechanisms where they will talk about brands/companies. This mechanism can maximize positive word-of-mouth and minimize negative word-of-mouth.

Since social media users are bombarded with multitude of messages every day and most of them are annoyed with that. Make sure that every time one conveys messages to consumers, they will not be irritated with that information. It also recommended that they must have a deeper and meaningful way of communication with consumers. Express properly the unique properties of the brand/product/company.

Formulation of effective and doable viral marketing campaigns is also recommended.

- **Use of Viral Videos.** One of the cheapest ways to have an effective viral marketing campaign for a company or brand is through viral videos. New breeds of marketers should explore the utilization of viral videos in social networking sites to drive growth by customer advocacy. More and more users of social media now are college students. Take advantage of the usage of social media in spreading viral videos.
- **Empowered Involvement.** Let the clients be involved in the brand/company. The use of mobile texting or web polls can really empower consumers thus possibly yield to positive referral.
- **“Campaign for a Cause.”** Conceptualizing good corporate social responsibility campaigns and launching them through social media can greatly affect the company’s growth. Let the consumers discuss and tell stories about the causal campaigns.

Give them the reason to recommend these campaigns to others.

- **The Use of Trial Advertising.** Instead of using the traditional marketing strategies, firms should learn to innovate their marketing campaigns. Let the clients integrate the brand to their daily activities. According to Marsden et al (2005), the idea of tryvertising (trial advertising) is that, rather than provide free samples or trials to anyone in a target market; it involves sampling on a careful selection and exclusion basis to lead users – ideally with new products or services before they become extensively available.
- **Product/Brand Innovation and Interactive Marketing Campaigns.** Innovation plays a vital role in the viral campaign because, generally speaking, poor product/brand will only generate negative buzz on social media. Making the campaign and interactive and fun will spawn effective viral marketing campaigns because Facebook users for instance will most likely like and share the said campaigns.

The core of viral marketing campaigns is understanding and appreciating the viral marketing loop of *see, click, desire to share*, and *share* the campaign (Carter, 2011). The success of the viral marketing loop on Facebook depends on the viral marketing campaigns of the different brands / products / businesses.

One of the limitations of the study is the number of participants in the undertaking. A judgmental or purposive sampling technique was used to observe the 31 participants. A further study may be done by future researchers by having a much wider and bigger number of participants to determine

how viral marketing campaigns can affect brands / products / businesses.

In the final analysis, this study about the importance of viral marketing on social media can change the landscape of traditional marketing campaigns. The advent of the social media age needs new breeds of marketers who can create campaigns that can reach the audience in a wider scale.

REFERENCES

- Alhabash, Saleem, Anna R. McAlister, Amy Hagerstrom, Elizabeth Taylor Quilliam, Nora J. Rifon, and Jef I. Richards. "Between likes and shares: Effects of emotional appeal and virality on the persuasiveness of anticyberbullying messages on Facebook." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 16, no. 3 (2013): 175-182. doi:10.1089/cyber.2012.0265
- Carter, Brian. "9 Secrets to Successful Facebook Viral Marketing." *Allfacebook: The Unofficial Facebook Blog*, July 14, 2011. Accessed July 14, 2014. http://allfacebook.com/9-secrets-to-successful-facebook-viral-marketing_b50545
- Chu, Shu-Chuan. "Viral advertising in social media: Participation in Facebook groups and responses among college-aged users." *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 12, no. 1 (2011): 30-43. doi: 10.1080/15252019.2011.10722189
- Gil-Or, Oren. "Building consumer demand by using viral marketing tactics within an online social network." *Advances in Management* (2010).
- Ho, Jason YC, and Melanie Dempsey. "Viral marketing: Motivations to forward online content." *Journal of Business Research* 63, no. 9 (2010): 1000-1006. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.08.010

- Howard, Philip EN, Lee Rainie, and Steve Jones. "Days and nights on the internet the impact of a diffusing technology." *American Behavioral Scientist* 45, no. 3 (2001): 383-404. doi: 10.1177/0002764201045003003
- Internet World Stats. "Asia Marketing Research, Internet Usage, Population Statistics and Facebook Information." Accessed July 14, 2014. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm>
- Kotler, Philip, and Gary Armstrong. *Principles of Marketing 15th Global Edition*. Pearson, 2013.
- Kumar, Sameer, and Promma Phrommathed. *Research methodology*. Springer US, 2005.
- Leskovec, Jure, Lada A. Adamic, and Bernardo A. Huberman. "The dynamics of viral marketing." *ACM Transactions on the Web (TWEB)* 1, no. 1 (2007): 5. doi: 10.1145/1232722.1232727
- Magdirila, Phoebe. "Philippines records the biggest internet population growth globally." *Tech in Asia*, March 13, 2014. Accessed July 14, 2014. <http://www.techinasia.com/philippines-records-biggest-internet-population-growth-globally/>
- Marlow, C. "Primates on Facebook." *The economist* (2009).
- Rogers Everett, M. "Diffusion of innovations." *New York* (1995).
- Smith, Justin. *The Facebook Marketing Bible: 40+ Ways to Market Your Brand, Company, Product, Or Service Inside Facebook*. Inside Facebook, 2009.
- Snyder, Pete. "Wanted: Standards For Viral Marketing." *The New Media Sphere*, June 28, 2004. Accessed July 21, 2011.
- Strang, David, and Sarah A. Soule. "Diffusion in organizations and social movements: From hybrid corn to poison pills." *Annual review of sociology* (1998): 265-290.
- Subramani, Mani R., and Balaji Rajagopalan. "Knowledge-sharing and influence in online social networks via viral

marketing." *Communications of the ACM* 46, no. 12 (2003): 300-307.

Wallace, Elaine, Isabel Buil, and Leslie De Chernatony. "Facebook 'friendship' and brand advocacy." *Journal of Brand Management* 20, no. 2 (2012): 128-146. doi:10.1057/bm.2012.45

Wilson, Ralph F. "The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing." Web Marketing Today, May 10, 2012. Accessed July 14, 2014.

Dr. Jean Paolo G. Lacap, RMP, AFBE

Management and Entrepreneurship Department

Angeles University Foundation

jeanpao13@yahoo.com

+63922 624 0225

Dr. Jean Paolo G. Lacap is the present chairperson of the Management and Entrepreneurship Department and a graduate school professor at Angeles University Foundation. He is a Registered Marketing Profession (RMP) and an Associate Fellow in Business Education (AFBE). He was a recipient of the prestigious Young Achiever Award in Business Education 2014 awarded by the Philippine Council of Deans and Educators in Business (PCDEB) and a Finalist for the 2013 A-BEST Educator of the Philippines. His research interests include competitiveness, strategy, word-of-mouth marketing, entrepreneurship, and customer relationship management.