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WHY PASS ON VIRAL MESSAGES? BECAUSE THEY CONNECT EMOTIONALLY

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WHY PASS ON VIRAL MESSAGES? BECAUSE THEY CONNECT EMOTIONALLY

ABSTRACT: We identify that successful viral marketing campaigns trigger an emotional response in recipients. We examine the effects of viral messages containing the six primary emotions – surprise, joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust – on recipients' emotional responses to viral marketing campaigns and subsequent forwarding behavior. Messages need to contain surprise to be effective. By itself, however, surprise is not enough and must therefore be combined with other emotions. The effectiveness of the viral message is moderated by gender, with disgust-based and fear-based campaigns more likely to be forwarded by male recipients and female recipients, respectively. The ability of the message to capture recipients' imagination and a clearly targeted message are key in ensuring forwarding behavior. Achieving fit between a campaign and the featured emotions is important, as this ensures increased chance of forwarding. Managerial implications of using different emotions are discussed. Lastly, culture is recognized as an influencer.

Key words: Viral Marketing; E-Commerce; Marketing Communications; Consumer Emotions.

1.0. VIRAL MESSAGES: DO WE REALLY KNOW HOW THEY WORK?

Viral marketing has been described as "the process of getting customers to pass along a company's marketing message to friends, family, and colleagues" (Laudon & Traver, 2001: p. 381). Like a virus, information about the company and its brand message, goods, or services is spread to potential buyers who pass the information on to other potential buyers so that a huge network is created rapidly (Dobele, Toleman & Beverland, 2005; Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005). With the introduction of electronic media, viral marketing has gained tremendously in popularity because such media facilitate interconnections between companies and potential buyers dramatically (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2003; Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006). World-known companies have jumped on the bandwagon and used this technique successfully, including Budweiser, De Beers, eBay, Jose Cuervo Tequila, Kellogg's, Levi's, Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, Scope Mouthwash, and Virgin Cinemas.

Among famous viral marketing campaigns is the message of 'GET YOUR PRIVATE, FREE EMAIL AT HTTP:\\WWW.HOTMAIL.COM' that spread to 11 million users in only 18 months (Kelly, 2000). In another campaign, PayPal acquired more than three million users in the campaign's first nine months of workings (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2003). Seth Godin's (2001) book *Unleash the Ideavirus*, which is about viral marketing, was made available free-of-charge on <http://www.ideavirus.com> so that readers could send a full electronic version of the book to their friends.

When executed effectively, viral marketing campaigns can create an instantaneous buzz in the promotion and distribution of companies' brands and products. This was the case when Artisan Entertainment, the maker of *The Blair Witch Project*, created much interest in the movie by giving it the 'air' of a documentary and supporting it with an Internet site. People talked about *The Blair Witch Project* and referred their friends to the site (Bernard &

Jallat, 2001). The budget for the movie's release was just \$US2.5 million, but the movie grossed \$US245 million in worldwide box office sales.

Despite the fact that viral marketing can be a successful means of marketing communication there is still only a limited understanding of how viral marketing works (Borroff, 2000; Brodin, 2000; Diorio, 2001; Helm, 2000). For example, De Bruyn and Lilien (2003: p. 4) posit that "it is difficult to [...] explain why and how [viral marketing] works." What we do know is that viral marketing campaigns can result in peer-to-peer recommendations, thereby increasing the credibility of the message. Viral marketing can drive sales, reduce marketing costs, and reach media-jaded consumer segments such as Generation X and Generation Y. Viral marketing may involve people who know each other (cf. the Refer-a-Friend program of Half.com) and people who do not know each other (cf. the sites of Epinions.com and ConsumerReports.org that provide a forum for consumers to post their objective product reviews to other interested consumers). It is key that the company chooses very carefully which consumers should first pass on the viral marketing message, as the creation of viral networks rests upon these people (Helm, 2000; Bannan, 2000).

For viral marketing to work there must be something uniquely powerful about the message, something that encourages would-be-advocates to pass it on. For example, in the case of Viagra the message captures the imagination and highlights a completely new product that lends itself to referrals. However, if the goal of viral marketing is to use peer-to-peer communications in order to spread information about a brand or idea, what really drives consumers to pass the message on? Viral marketing messages face several challenges because spamming is frowned upon in the online world and nobody likes to feel used (Dobele, Toleman & Beverland, 2005). Essentially, peer-to-peer electronic messages are facing the same problems associated with clutter and noise that traditional advertising suffers from. So what then can companies do?

We argue that emotions, and in particular the phenomenon of social sharing of emotions, offer a solution to this problem faced by companies. To illustrate we consider the impact of the six primary emotions on message forwarding in nine chosen viral marketing campaigns. Also, we examine gender as a moderator on the relationship between emotions and forwarding behavior. We identify that to secure the success of a viral message it is key that the message captures the imagination of the recipient, and that the message is cleverly targeted. Our study's findings are summarized in six points that must be considered in designing successful viral marketing campaigns.

2.0. IT'S ALL ABOUT EMOTIONS: WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

We argue in this article that viral marketing messages must build an emotional connection between the campaign and recipient to ensure the virus gets spread. Why emotions? Hirsh (2001) interviewed three leading spokespersons of electronic marketing businesses (Yankee Group, Giga Information Group, and Aberdeen) about viral marketing campaigns and concluded that a campaign should be either intriguing, passionate, fun, unique, or create interest (e.g., incorporating interactive games). Masland (2001, p. 3) stated, "If the content of the email is funny, interesting or emotional enough to have an impact, the recipients often forward it – viral message and all – to friends and family." According to research done by Clark McKay and Walpole Interactive (an interactive sales promotion agency), the highest response rates can be found in messages that contain violence, pornography, or irreverent humor (Witthaus 2002). The 'Are you Type 1?' campaign made for *Levi's* used the creation of curiosity among the consumers as the main driver of the campaign. To pique people's interest, recipients were asked 'Are you Type 1?' and then encouraged to ask themselves if they could be the person Levi's was looking for. Table 1 gives an overview

of different emotions that have previously been suggested in the literature as driving viral marketing campaigns.

Insert Table 1 about here

We argue that emotions work in viral marketing because emotions are related to the phenomenon of 'social sharing of emotions' that is defined as "a phenomenon involving (1) the evocation of the emotion in a socially shared language and (2) at least at the symbolic level at some addressee" (Rimé *et al.*, 1992: p. 228). People, who experience everyday life emotions, initiate communication processes during which they share parts of their private experiences with social partners. Only about 10 percent of emotional experiences are kept secret and never socially shared with anyone (Rimé *et al.*, 1992). There is also evidence that the more disruptive an event is the sooner and the more frequently it is shared. Social sharing of emotions is also positively related to the intensity of the emotions (Rimé *et al.*, 1998).

In particular, we examine the use and impact of emotions on consumers' decision to pass on viral marketing messages. To our knowledge, previous research has not investigated this issue. We argue that emotions are key in driving viral marketing campaigns. For example, it has been shown (Maute & Dubé, 1999) that emotional responses account for a large part (about 30 percent) of the explained variance of referral behavior. Consider the emotion of surprise. It has been noted that companies "need to move beyond mere satisfaction to customer delight" (Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham, 1996: p. 229), and that the features that have "the capacity to delight are those that are [...] surprisingly pleasant" (Rust & Oliver, 2000: p. 87). The emotion of surprise has a strong influence on referral behavior (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). Surprise is, however, only one of six primary emotions: surprise, fear, sadness, joy, disgust, and anger (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996; Plutchik, 1980). We

contribute to the literature by examining the use of these six primary emotions in viral marketing campaigns. In so doing, our findings build on a previous study that examined tactical strategies associated with successful viral marketing campaign execution (see Dobeles, Toleman & Beverland, 2005) by looking at the decision to pass on messages from the recipient's viewpoint. We also build on a previous study that explored what made consumers judge a viral marketing campaign as especially successful (see Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005).

3.0. THE STUDY'S METHOD

We selected nine viral marketing campaigns to study, details of which are provided in Table 2. From a list of numerous potential viral marketing campaigns these nine campaigns were chosen on the basis of two main criteria, global and successful. A convenience sample was used for individual selection. Success was judged from the initiator's perspective through increased turnover, sales, or brand development, or in terms of how far the message spread. However, the final selection of campaigns could not be a completely random process due to the size of the topic. For example, a Google search of 'viral marketing' generated 680,000 hits, far too many for an exploratory search of the relationship between emotion and forwarding behavior. It was, therefore, necessary to develop an alternative approach to campaign selection. Individual campaigns were on the basis of a convenience sample of campaigns selected from asking friends, family, and work colleagues about campaigns they had seen recently. This approach resulted in a long campaign list that was then shortened to nine campaigns judged to be both global and successful. In summary, two campaigns sought to promote the company (Amazon and e-Tractions), four campaigns sought to promote new products (Dr Pepper, Honda, Motorola, and Rock the Vote), one company was trying to

increase awareness (Non Government Organizations), and one company was trying to save itself (Save BNN).

Insert Table 2 about here

20 consumers accepted our invitation to participate in a survey and a subsequent in-depth interview, the purpose of which was to investigate how consumers responded emotionally to each of the nine selected viral marketing campaigns. A summary of the consumers' emotional responses to each campaign is given in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

More specifically, the extent to which respondents experienced one or more of the six primary emotions was investigated in the following way. Respondents were asked to evaluate the level to which each of the six emotions was experienced (1="no such feeling"; 5="very much this feeling"). Surprise would be determined through three items that related to the experience of surprise, amazement, and astonishment. The higher respondents evaluated their experiences of these three items, the more the respondents had felt surprise. In a similar fashion each of the other five primary emotions would be determined using respondents' felt experiences of three different items. These items were feeling joyful, delighted, and happy (emotion of joy), distress, sad, and downhearted (emotion of sadness), discouraged, mad, and enraged (emotion of anger), afraid, scared, and fearful (emotion of fear), and disgust, distaste, and revulsion (emotion of disgust). These 18 items originate from Izard (1977). To decrease the likelihood of bias the 18 items appeared in a randomized sequence in the survey. In all, 180 evaluations were generated from surveying 20 consumers, with each of the nine

campaigns being evaluated by these 20 consumers asking them to indicate to which extent they felt six emotions (each of which was determined using three different items). To illustrate, a summary of consumers' felt emotions for the Weapons of Mass Destruction is given in Table 4. For additional information on the number of respondents we refer to note A.

Insert Table 4 about here

4.0. THE IMPACT OF SIX EMOTIONS ON MESSAGE FORWARDING

4.1. Surprise-based campaigns

Surprise was the dominant emotion identified by the consumers across each campaign. The emotion of surprise is generated when something is unexpected or misexpected, with surprise resulting in responses of amazement and astonishment (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). For example, the Weapons of Mass Destruction viral marketing campaign used the emotion of surprise, with one respondent saying that 'when the page opened, I thought I had made a mistake and got something of a virus on my PC.' Blueyonder (an internet service provider) developed this campaign for Amazon.co.uk called to increase awareness with potential customers about Amazon's services. An e-mail was sent out telling people to type 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' in the search bar of Google and click on the "I'm Feeling Lucky" button. This button directs searchers to the highest ranked link page (this first place on the Google ranking can be bought by owners of websites). The resulting search was a Weapons of Mass Destruction error page developed for Amazon indicating that the weapons of mass destruction could not be found, and provided satirical jokes about how the U.S. government was incorrect about the existence of such weapons in Iraq. The page offered a fake blueprint for invading a country supposedly having the capability of mass destruction. The fake error page also provided three links to different pages, two of which led to a further

link to buy a book called *Pieces of Intelligence: The Existential Poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld* at Amazon.co.uk with a discount of 20 percent. The third link on the page led to the possibility to buy a t-shirt at Amazon.co.uk with different kinds of anti Iraq-war texts printed on the back and even one with the error page printed on it. The viral marketing campaign proved successful for Amazon, with 30 percent of people who visited the fake error page clicking on the links to Amazons' home page, well above average banner click through rates of 4.7 percent (Gatarski, 2002).

In the nine studied viral marketing campaigns the emotion of surprise was always expressed in combination with at least one of the other five primary emotions, thereby corroborating previous findings that surprise is often accompanied with other primary emotions (Charlesworth, 1969).

4.2 Joy-based campaigns

Campaigns that gave rise to emotion of joy resulted in happiness and delight. Joy has been linked to helpfulness and cooperation, desire, and liking (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996). Consumers felt joy after viewing the Weapons of Mass Destruction, Raging Cow, Honda Accord, and Motorola V70 campaigns. The campaigns used different ways to elicit the emotion – the Raging Cow campaign used humor, Honda Accord used idealism, and Motorola V70 used financial incentives to elicit joy. The Raging Cow campaign is considered next.

In order to promote the five flavors of its new milk drink, PepsiCo started the Raging Cow viral marketing campaign aimed at encouraging children (the target segment) to ask their parents to purchase this product. On opening the website a scene is presented where a funny-looking cartoon cow is running across the monitor with a pitch fork in its hoof, crashing into five different flavored bottles of the milk product. During this action, a loud

mooring sound can be heard. Consumers said that the cow was 'crazy looking' and 'funny.' After the introduction, the main menu opens and features the animated cow with a pitchfork, which is then used to show items used for flavoring the milk products. These items range from fruits and chocolate to a coffee cup indicating the coffee flavor. Further into the website the consumer has the option of viewing the Raging Cow's diary where bloggers have posted entries. Interaction with the site is possible through a quiz that determines what type of flavor best suits a consumer's needs. The last link on the site is the agenda indicating when places the promotion team of Raging Cow is visiting next. When typing the words 'Raging Cow' in Google approximately 42,000 hits were displayed in numerous languages.

Campaigns based around surprise and joy can have a big impact. For example, to promote the new Accord, Honda created a two-minute promotional film called the 'Cog' to bring viewers in touch with the feeling of fun associated with the website (www.hondajoymachine.com) and the new model vehicle. Surprise was also used. As part of the film, consumers see a dismantled Accord after which a process is set in motion that eventually leads to a fully operationable Accord. Consumers feel even more surprised when a flag pops up and they hear a voice saying 'isn't it nice when things just work?' The campaign started with 500 emails (including the movie attachment) sent to employees of Honda and its agencies. Within one week, the website was visited by 2,779 users. After three weeks, the number increased to 35,000, and halfway through 2003 (three years after the launch) as many as 4.5 million people had seen the short film.

4.3. Sadness-based campaigns

Sadness results in feelings of distress or being downhearted (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). The emotion of sadness can be used to encourage support or sympathy for a campaign. The International Federation of Red Cross campaign (which also involved other non-

governmental organizations [NGOs] such as World Relief, the Salvation Army, and UNICEF) sought to encourage donations for victims of natural disasters. The earthquake in Iran in 2003 was a recent campaign. This campaign provided news stories about the death toll and the victims' plights including living conditions and hardships faced. A viral marketing campaign provided an informative newsletter and encouraged viewers to pass it on to friends and family through a 'tell-a-friend' button. The website also asked for donations of money or other aid (e.g., old clothes, blankets, or physical assistance).

Sadness is useful for garnering support for victims of natural disasters and 'Acts of God' when no person or organization can be blamed for the victim's plight because if this were the case then people would feel anger instead (Sreams, 1993). One important social function of sadness is that it may lead the sad individual to make emotional and practical demands on others and thereby strengthen social bonds that lead to altruism on others' behalf as well (Izard, 1977). As a result, sadness is an effective emotion for encouraging support for the viral marketing campaigns of charitable organizations.

4.4. Anger-based campaigns

People feel angry when someone can be identified as being the cause of the injustice, or when they think they can accomplish a particular goal by expressing anger (Power & Dalgleish, 1997). Anger can be used by NGOs or pressure groups to encourage support for a cause, particularly when the victim's plight is due to the actions of others. For example, the Organization of Women's Freedom posted a petition on their website on December 30, 2003 alerting people to the plight of women's rights activists in Kurdish-controlled Northern Iraq (Kurdish authorities had threatened to shut down the offices of women's rights activists). The petition called for letters of protest to be sent into the Organization of Women's Freedom in solidarity with the Iraqi women. Also, the petition encouraged people to forward the message

to friends and family, and e-mail their political party standard texts indicating their anger towards the situation in Northern Iraq. By giving examples of injustices suffered by some Iraqi women, the Organization of Women's Freedom hoped to garner support for their plight. The Organization of Women's Freedom tracked the forwarding activities of the petition by asking people that sent in the petition to add their e-mail address as conform copy (cc) to the email. Our respondents remarked that the situation of Kurdish women appeared so different to the situation of women in Western Europe that they almost could not comprehend it, and that they got angry that this was happening in the 21st century.

Another example is the Dutch public broadcasting agency BNN. The Dutch minority government promised that BBN could keep their license if they had more than 150,000 members. Unfortunately for BNN, another parliamentary group had the right of veto over the decision so BNN sought public support for their agency through the general public e-mailing parliament. The BNN website offered the facility of emailing parliament and forwarding the email to four friends through a viral campaign (Save BNN). Consumers explained that they felt angry "against the government, and that the government need to keep its promises." Through these efforts BNN reached 224,000 members. The overall success rate of this campaign is exemplified in the one month where 123,795 people used the mailing service telling the government to keep BNN. As a result, BNN was granted its license.

4.5. Fear-based campaigns

Fear is an emotion that can encourage action, especially when it results in outrage. When a frightening situation occurs, or when a pain, threat, or danger is expected, people feel fear (Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Oatley & Jenkins, 1996). The emotion of fear was the primary emotion used in the Rock the Vote campaign (see Insert 1). Rock the Vote was founded in 1990 to encourage young Americans to become involved in political issues and register to

vote. This non-profit organization started a campaign, using shocking images about issues such as rape, abortion, gun control, and capital punishment encapsulated in an interactive quiz. The images and text used in the quiz attempted to shock disinterested youth. In the period that the campaign was active, it was viewed approximately 22 million times, and generated a click-through rate of 35 percent (the campaign also had some role in ensuring the highest voter turnout in years for the 2004 U.S. election). The consumers found that fear may be particularly useful for encouraging forwarding when it is used in campaigns highlighting issues known to be of relevance among peers, or when attempting to gain short-term support for a cause (such as during a political campaign), although may be less useful for encouraging long-term support. In the case of Rock the Vote campaign, respondents remarked that the message made them afraid because of "the high numbers of rape and abuse," and that they would definitely forward the message "because everybody should know this, and that they can do something against it."

Place Insert 1 about here

4.6. Disgust-based campaigns

Disgust, or bad taste, has a very short duration and is relatively low in felt intensity (Scherer & Walbot, 1994). People feel disgusted when something is harming their soul, or when something threatens to do so (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). In the Christmas Cards campaign, for example, during Christmas in 2001, e-tractions (an IT company) replaced the sending of regular Christmas cards with electronic versions. The goal of this new card was to impress clients of their IT capabilities and encourage clients to forward the cards and associated company information to potential clients. The e-Christmas card depicts a snow globe featuring a house and outdoor Christmas tree. As a potential client 'plays,' the snow

falls, the characters ski and snowboard, shovel snow, and make a snowman. At the conclusion, the snowman 'eats' one of the characters and then explodes, causing more snow to fall in the globe. While the campaign failed in its first year (2001), as clients could not see the link between exploding cartoon characters and an IT company, the campaign became popular during the following Christmas and within six weeks the e-card had been viewed by over 200,000 people (on the six busiest days the number of visitors reached a peak of 26,000 a day). The most astonishing part is that the link to the page was removed from the e-traction's website after the failure of the campaign. People were sending the address through email and cutting and pasting it into their web browser's address bar. The huge numbers of requests made e-tractions repost the link.

However, this campaign also illustrates that disgust can be used for good or bad, as some consumers (particularly young males in our sample) find humor in disgusting situations, or when disgust is placed in surreal situations. Respondents said that the campaign "is not my type of humor, exploding children" and that "parents will not be glad when their children will see this campaign." Yet, several respondents could "still see fun in the campaign," not having expected exploding characters in a "surreal setting."

A summary of the emotions, with an explanation, its behavior, physiological response, and other characteristics, is given in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

5.0. TWO KEYS TO SECURE THE SUCCESS OF VIRAL MESSAGES

Our analysis of the comments made by campaign and viral message recipients suggests that emotions may not be enough to secure action, and therefore success. Through analysis of the open-ended responses of interviewees two main themes emerged. First, that

the campaigns triggered 'something' in the respondents who forwarded these messages. The messages captured the recipients' imagination in such a way as to produce an action – forwarding behavior. Second, the most often downloaded have been cleverly targeted, that is, sent to a cohort that would be most likely to respond favorably, and subsequently forwarding the message. Each of these two themes is considered next.

5.1. Viral messages must capture the imagination of the recipient

Our findings identify that the overall success of a campaign, in terms of forwarding behavior, goes beyond an emotional connection. A campaign must also capture the recipients' imagination in a unique or unforgettable way. We note that 73 percent of our respondents said they forward campaigns that had something more than just a great joke. For example, respondents forward important messages or something particularly disgusting. Our respondents also indicated that, for example, surprise was effective only when coupled with (at least) a second emotion, such as joy (resulting in delight) or disgust (resulting in humor). For example, the Weapons of Mass Destruction campaign was forwarded because of the funny jokes it contained and the surprise ("I thought something else was going to happen"). Raging Cow was forwarded because of the surprising ending coupled with the use of humor ("I was surprised they would use such a crazy looking cow to promote their product" and "I thought of it as finally, something different, with the sound and everything"). The Honda Accord viral marketing campaign was thought to be 'inventive,' 'original,' and 'unique,' 'well thought out,' and 'nicely made,' with a very unique idea behind the advertising message. The Christmas Cards received particular attention and was forwarded because of its 'malicious delight' and 'gross humor.' While the campaign was deemed 'less funny' the more times it was viewed, it was still forwarded to others.

5.2. Viral messages must be cleverly targeted

A well-targeted campaign also encourages consumers to forward viral messages (44 percent indicated they would forward a well-targeted campaign). A well-targeted viral marketing message would generate positive responses towards the message and forwarding behavior from recipients. Such campaigns did so because they provided a message to the right target audience in a timely manner without offence, or technological problems such as download time. Particularly well targeted campaigns included Rock the Vote ("good reason to vote," "everybody should know about the information provided," and "it is relevant to everyone"). However, not all the consumers felt the Rock the Vote campaign was successful, believing that the image of a child pointing a gun was "too confronting." Another example of a well-targeted viral marketing campaign was the Save BNN campaign ("BNN makes nice programs, so I was surprised by the fact that they could be removed from the television" and "It is a pity that BNN should be removed"). This sympathy and empathy for BNN and the service it provides resulted in forwarding behavior.

Motorola increased the success of their campaign by using a database containing the addresses of people who previously registered on the company's website. These people had already shown an interest in Motorola's telephones, making them the perfect target group (in comparison to sending e-mails to random prospects who may or may not have been interested in the product). In a period of two weeks, the campaign made the original database grow by 400 percent. On average, 75 percent of the recipients referred to at least one friend, and 40 percent clicked on the link to visit Motorola's website to find out more about their V70 model.

6.0. SIX THINGS TO REMEMBER FOR ACHIEVING FIT BETWEEN EMOTIONS AND VIRAL MESSAGES

Our analysis of the nine viral marketing campaigns leads to the important managerial implication that marketers must achieve fit between a key emotion and their brand or viral marketing campaign because this will ensure increased chance of forwarding. Suggested fit is covered in the six points below (remember: all campaigns must achieve an element of surprise).

First, viral marketing campaigns using joy are most suited to irreverent or fun brands such as Virgin, Apple, and Chick-Fil-A, or campaigns such as Amazon's, Ford's Evil Car, and the Australian Meat Board's Eat Lamb campaign that seeks to encourage interest in a mature category. Joy-based campaigns are also suited for brands seeking to revitalize their image such as Honda. Brands targeting younger consumers may also benefit from using joy. Brands or campaigns for which joy would be particularly inappropriate would include more serious brands or issues.

Second, viral marketing campaigns using sadness are most suited to social marketers seeking an immediate response to disasters (thus timing is critical), particularly acts of god. Consumers reacting to campaigns dominated by sadness were most likely to show a short-term commitment to the brand or campaign, rather than become encouraged to engage in long-term change. For example, campaigns seeking child sponsorship in less developed countries were viewed as less successful when relying solely on sadness. Instead, these campaigns were often dominated by images of hope and messages that small contributions would make a big difference. Marketers must be careful to ensure that campaigns based around sadness encourage benevolence rather than guilt.

Third, viral marketing campaigns based on anger are most suited to single issue campaigns seeking an immediate reaction to injustice. For example, the BNN campaign was seeking support for the perceived unjust act of the parliament. Other such campaigns used by social marketers may include reactions to threats of destruction of wilderness areas, threats

from governments including forthcoming acts of parliament, and perceived injustices perpetrated by corporations. Brands facing competitive threats that wish to mobilize support for their cause, or support for government action limiting the competitors actions (such as Wal-Mart opening a new store in a local area) may also benefit from anger campaigns. Anger is a fleeting emotion and therefore is ill suited to campaigns that require longer-term action (for example climate change), or where issues may be complex or subtle, and thus not elicit an angry response from many people. Anger is best used in situations where people are being cheated because anger then takes on a protective role for people.

Fourth, viral marketing campaigns based around fear must be used very carefully and sparingly. The Rock the Vote campaign received the most mixed response of all the campaigns analyzed. Fear is also a short-term response to a perceived threat. Therefore, campaigns seeking to change behavior such as those on drink driving, drug use, sexual practices, or speeding may be best suited to fear when combined with either a solution (such as having a designated driver or using condoms), a punishment (such as speeding fines), or links to further information for concerned recipients.

Fifth, viral marketing campaigns using disgust or bad taste are best used when targeting young males, for rebel-styled brands such Australia's Maverick Channel Seven, or for brands targeting cultures who find disgusting events campaign humorous (such as Japan, Germany, and the Pacific Islands). Disgust-based campaigns in particular must be careful of crossing the fine line of acceptability, and must provide a humorous and surprising message at the right time. Brands should use disgust campaigns only intermittently, for example around major events such as the Super Bowl or Christmas, and must be carefully targeted to avoid unnecessary offence.

For the fourth and fifth points in particular we also note that the gender has a moderating influence of the forwarding behavior. Our findings show that, in viral marketing

marketing, male recipients are more likely to pass on viral messages than are female recipients (63 percent male to 37 percent female). Men are also more likely to pass on messages involving humor, particularly disgusting humor, than are women. In addition, we found the emotional responses of fear felt by female respondents were stronger than those felt by the male respondents. For example, when responding to a campaign featuring a fear element, female respondents used all three fear-related terms: afraid, scared, and fearful. Male respondents were less likely to use all three terms. In instances where female respondents felt fear the viral marketing campaign was more likely to be forwarded, as women tried to help other women by alerting them to the 'danger' or to a situation that could be scary.

Finally, culture's influence on viral marketing campaigns will need to be taken into account. For example, in contrast to bricks-and-mortar companies, online companies are not confined to a single country with a well-defined culture. Studies have identified cultural background in this context as a key managerial consideration (Singh, Zhao, &, 2005). In our study, in a similar fashion, whilst people think of sadness as being an unwanted emotion, people in several Asian countries regard feeling sadness as a step along the road to salvation (Izard, 1991). It is likely that differences are also found in how people from different cultures experience the other five primary emotions. The global nature of viral marketing means the issue of culture must be addressed prior to the launch of a new campaign. Online technologies also make it much easier for recipients to complain to others about a campaign they find offensive. It's a fine line to walk between innovative advertising and offensive attention seeking, but it must be walked if a campaign is to be judged a success.

7.0. CONCLUSIONS

In the increasingly competitive market that many companies operate in today, viral marketing is only an effective marketing tool so long as it encourages consumers to take action as a result of the message (for example, product or service purchase, switching, or new product/service trial – in short, consumption of the brand, product, or service advertised in the viral marketing message), and pass along the message to other prospects. Therefore, the goal of viral marketing is twofold: consumption and forwarding behavior. This article contributed to the literature by considering nine viral campaigns and the success or failure of each campaign on forwarding behavior. Our findings highlight that successful viral campaigns link emotion to the message (to encourage recipients to respond to that message). However, the use of emotions may not be enough. Companies must ensure that their message captures the imagination of the recipients (in order to differentiate the message from all the other numerous messages that recipients are exposed to every single day). Also, companies must consider targeting cleverly. Sending a message to a cohort that is receptive to brand, product, or service has a better chance of success than simply emailing to the world at large.

Also, while some attempts have been made to categorize the types of people who offer referrals (e.g., Gladwell, 2000; Higie, Feick, & Price, 1987; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Slama, Natarajan, & Williams, 1992) and to consider the role of gender in referral behavior (e.g., Wiedmann, Walsh, & Mitchell, 2001; Wood, 2005), we still do not empirically know the impact, if any, of gender on referral behavior. Our findings also contributed on this important topic by identifying empirically the impact of gender on referral behavior.

We already know that people talk to other people. The Internet and communications technology does so far easier, faster, and less costly than at any other time in history. For practitioners, viral marketing offers a means of communicating marketing messages at low-cost with a significantly reduced response time and potential for market impact. Has your organization learnt this marketing language yet?

NOTE A

With regards to the number of respondents, Rust & Cooil (1994) have demonstrated a high probability of a good reliability of the uniformity between the different respondents when a panel of 20 respondents and 5-point Likert scales are used. If we want an exploratory proportional reduction in loss reliability of 70 percent (which is generally agreed to be acceptable) then a proportion of interjudge agreement of 0.235 is needed (Rust & Cooil, 1994). The proportion of interjudge agreements is found as the total number of actual interjudge agreements relative to the total number of all possible interjudge agreements. For the Weapons of Mass Destruction campaign the value of $1803/3420=0.527$ (which is higher than 0.235) indicates that we have good reliability of the uniformity between the different respondents (Rust & Cooil, 1994). For the other campaigns, the lowest proportion of interjudge agreements was 0.324, while the remaining proportions of interjudge agreements were between 0.477 and 0.765, all above the required 0.235. This means, therefore, that it is possible to make reliable assumptions with regards to how different emotions were felt in each campaign.

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Table 1: Different emotions behind viral marketing

Mechanism(s)	Source and explanation	Mechanism(s)	Source and explanation
Entertainment, amusement, irritation	<i>Splash of Paint</i> : People are directed to the company's Internet site by entertaining, amusing, and/or irritating them.	Coolness, fun; unique offer	<i>Virgin Atlantic</i> : Customers pass on the message when they think it is cool or fun, or if the offer is second to none.
Fun, quirk, amusement; Specific and relevant to the person	<i>Claritas</i> : Viral marketing campaigns should be funny, quirky, or amusing, or something that is very specific and relevant to the individual customer.	Violence, pornography, irreverent humor	<i>Clark McKay and Walpole Interactive</i> : The messages drawing highest response rates are those who have elements of violence, pornography, or irreverent humor.
Fun, humor, excitement (jokes, games)	<i>Fabulous Bakin' Boys</i> : Its web site supports the muffin products with flash animation sites, fun, jokes, as well as games that people can download and forward to their friends.	Comic strips, video clips	Comic strips and video clips grab the attention of people who then forward the content to their friends.
Emotional elements	Internet strategies must have high levels of emotional content including interactivity, the ability to involve other people, chat rooms, and the creation of online community (Barnes & Cumby, 2002).	Contests and humor; important advice	Contests and humor are important elements in successful campaigns, which can also be successful if they have important advice to customers.
Nature of the industry; online tenure of the audience; topic	<i>Sage Marketing & Consulting Inc.</i> : The success of viral marketing is dependent upon (1) the nature of the industry that the company is in; (2) the online tenure of the audience; and (3) the topic. People are more likely to pass on information about products like entertainment, music, Internet, and software.	Controversy	A company gains publicity when the media writes about controversy on its Web sites, and competitors will have to deal with the company. But such word-of-mouth marketing can be dangerous because dissatisfied customers are more likely to share their negative experience than satisfied customers.
False, deliberately deceptive information; popularly believed narrative, typically false; anecdotal claims; junk	So-called 'urban legends and folklore' can be organized as (1) false, deliberately deceptive information; (2) popularly believed narrative, typically false; (3) anecdotal claims, which may be true, false, or in between; (4) and junk. Such stories are frequently forwarded to friends, family, and colleagues.	Fun, intrigue, value; offer of financial incentives; need to create network externalities	People pass on messages if they find the product benefits to be fun, intriguing, or valuable for others; if they are given financial incentives for doing so; or if they feel a need to create network externalities.

Source: Lindgreen & Vanhamme (2005: p. 126).

Table 2: Summary of the nine viral marketing campaigns studied

Name of campaign	Sponsor	Aim	Message
Amazon: Weapons of Mass Destruction	Blueyonder (an internet service provider) developed a viral marketing campaign for Amazon.co.uk	Promote the company	Type in the campaign name and an error page results in jokes about the US government and a fake blueprint for invading the country of choice. The fake error page provided three links to different pages, two of which lead to an opportunity to buy a book called 'Pieces of Intelligence: The Existential Poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld' at Amazon.co.uk with a discount of 20 percent and Amazon shirts. Online version of Christmas card played as a short movie.
e-tractions – Christmas Cards	IT company	Promote the company; Impress clients with the IT capabilities of the company and encourage referral activities from these clients	
Dr Pepper/Seven Up: Raging Cow	The soft-drink producer Dr Pepper/Seven Up created a new milk based beverage called Raging Cow	Promote a new product	By using six children (bloggers) the site tried to get the product noticed by the correct target group that would then encourage parents and guardians to purchase this product.
Honda Accord	Honda	Promote a new product	Two minute movie showing all the components found in the Honda Accord dismantled and put together into a specific sequence creating a slow moving wave of actions that fall in to place like a domino game.
Motorola V70	Motorola	Promote a new product; enlargement of current database	E-mail newsletter sent to current customers listed on the company's database. Tracking of all forwarded emails generated the larger list. Rewards offered to clients who forwarded the information.
World Relief, the Salvation Army, UNICEF, and the International Federation of Red Cross	Several Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's)	Increase awareness of plights of others; seeking donations both financial and resource	A viral marketing campaign provided an informative newsletter and encouraged viewers to pass it on to friends and family through 'tell-a-friend' buttons. The website also asked for donations of money or other aid (e.g., old clothes, blankets, or physical assistance).
Organization of Women's Freedom	Organization of Women's Freedom	Increase awareness of plights of others; Freedom for Iraq women	Online petition posted on December, 30 2003.
BNN: Save BNN	Dutch public broadcasting agency Seeking to keep license	Save Company; Required: membership >150,000; public support for company to put pressure on government.	Encouragement of people to email parliament and register support.

Rock the Vote

Founded in 1990
Non-profit

Encourage young Americans to
become involved in political issues
and register to vote.

Shocking images about issues such as abortion, gun control and
capital punishment encapsulated in an interactive quiz. The images
and text used in the quiz made the youth aware of the problems and
enabled them to empathize with those affected.

Table 3: Emotions elicited in the different viral marketing campaigns

Viral marketing campaign	Surprise	Joy	Sadness	Anger	Disgust	Fear
Weapons of Mass Destruction	✓		✓	✓		
Christmas Cards	✓	✓				
Raging Cow	✓		✓			
Honda Accord	✓	✓				
Motorola V70	✓	✓				
Red Cross	✓		✓			✓
Organization of Women's Freedom	✓				✓	
Save BNN	✓		✓	✓		
Rock the Vote	✓	✓				

Table 4: Proportional Reduction in Loss (PRL) Reliability Measure for the Weapons of Mass Destruction campaign

	Emotion ^a																	Gender	
	Surprise			Joy			Sadness			Anger			Fear			Disgust			
	Surprise	Amazement	Astonishment	Joyful	Delighted	Happy	Distress	Sad	Downhearted	Discouraged	Mad	Enraged	Afraid	Scared	Fearful	Disgusted	Distaste		Revulsion
1	3	3	3	4	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
3	3	3	2	3	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
4	4	3	4	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	Male
5	4	4	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	Female
6	4	3	4	2	1	3	2	3	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	3	4	2	Female
7	3	2	2	4	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
8	4	4	3	3	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
9	4	4	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
10	4	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
11	4	3	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	Female
12	4	2	2	4	3	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
13	3	2	3	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Female
14	4	3	3	3	4	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Female
15	4	4	1	4	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	Male
16	4	1	2	4	2	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Male
17	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	Male
18	5	4	5	2	2	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Female
19	5	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	1	2	2	Male
20	5	4	3	2	2	1	2	3	3	3	2	1	2	3	2	5	4	3	Female
Scale Value	Frequencies																		
1	2	3	2	3	9	4	16	16	16	16	17	16	17	18	17	16	13	15	
2		3	5	5	8	6	3		2	1	2	2	2		2	1	4	4	
3	4	7	9	6	2	5	1	4	2	3	1	1	1	2		2	1	1	
4	11	6	3	6	1	5						1			1		2		
5	3	1	1													1			
Σ	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
# agreements	65	42	50	43	65	41	123	126	122	123	137	121	137	154	137	121	85	111	Σ 1803
# maximum agreements	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	Σ 3420

(a) The felt experience of emotions are measured using 5-point Likert scales (1='no such feeling'; 5='very much this feeling').

Table 5: Emotions behind viral marketing

Emotion	Explanation	Behavior	Physiological response	Other
Surprise	Generated when something (product, service, or attribute) is unexpected or misexpected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facial expressions like opened eyes and mouth, and raised eyebrows. • Cessation of on-going activities. • Sudden and involuntary focusing on the surprising product, service, or attribute. • Heightened consciousness of the surprising product, service, or attribute. • Subsequent curiosity/exploratory behavior. • Increase in the ability to retain in memory the surprising product, service, or attribute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in heart and respiration rates. • Increase in skin conductivity and neural activation. • Different cortical response wave patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective feeling of surprise. • Spontaneous vocalizations (Why, Oh, etc).
Joy	Expressed when a goal has been achieved, or that movement toward such an achievement has occurred. Also, joy is caused by a rational prospect of owning what we love or desire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A system is activated bringing the body in 'state of readiness'. • Escape and avoidance. • Facial expression as 'oblique eyebrows' and resulting 'vertical frown'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal discomfort (butterflies in the stomach). • Muscle tensioning. • Increased perspiration and heart rate. • Mouth drying out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In extreme form making laughing or giggling sounds.
Sadness	Experienced when not in a state of well-being, which is most often derived from the experience of a fearful event.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No longer wishes for action, but remain motionless and passive, or may occasionally rock to and fro. • Often focus is turned more toward the self. • Trying to solve the problem in hand. • Refugeing from the situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying or whimpering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention can decrease, but when completely focused on the situation at hand it can increase
Anger	Response to personal offence (an injustice) and that this injustice is in that person's power to settle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facial expression of joy is the smile. • Happy people are more helpful and cooperative. • Often energetic, active and bouncy. • Prompts the person to aim for higher goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting, hoping, or desiring to have an object when it is not present. • Loving or liking the object when it is already present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smile is used when people are not happy to mask another emotion.
Fear	Experienced when people expect (anticipate) a specific pain, threat, or danger.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facial expressions like frowning. • Hand gestures, opening of the mouth, spitting, and, in extreme cases, vomiting. • Distancing from the situation, this by an expulsion or removal of an offended stimulus, removal of the self from the situation, or lessening the attention on the subject. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased heart rate. • Nausea. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sounds like 'ach' and 'ugh'.
Disgust	Feeling of aversion that can be felt either when something happens or when something is perceived to be disgusting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attacking the cause of the anger through physical contact and verbal abuse. • Anger is extremely out of control (e.g. rage), and freezing of the body can occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised blood pressure ('the blood boils'). • Face reddening. • Muscle tensioning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally dependent. Northern European people show more muscular reactions, southerners show a bigger increase in blood pressure.

Source: Ekman & Friesen (1975), Izard (1977), Power & Dalglish (1997), Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley (1999), Scherer (1984), Scherer & Walbot (1994), Scherer, Walbott, & Summerfield (1986).

Insert 1: Rock the Vote campaign



Issues Programs Street Team Donate RTV Blog RTV Gear Register to Vote

Free Expression Violence Environment Education Economy Debt

Violence: Every day in America 2,402 children are abused or neglected. A woman is raped every sixty seconds. In 2001 there were 12,020 victims of hate crimes in the United States. What's being done to make our schools and streets safer? Want a less violent society? Tolerate, educate and speak your mind.

Source: Rock the Vote.