

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
AND ADVERTISING COLLECTION

Victoria L. Crittenden, *Editor*

Viral Marketing and Social Networks

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First published in 2014 by
Business Expert Press, LLC
222 East 46th Street, New York, NY 10017
www.businessexpertpress.com

ISBN-13: 978-1-60649-812-5 (paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-1-60649-813-2 (e-book)

Business Expert Press Digital and Social Media Marketing and
Advertising Collection

Collection ISSN: 2333-8822 (print)

Collection ISSN: 2333-8830 (electronic)

Cover and interior design by Exeter Premedia Services Private Ltd.,
Chennai, India

First edition: 2014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

Abstract

Viral marketing is the key to marketing success in the 21st century, and advertising is one of the most important tools in the viral marketing toolkit. This book offers an in-depth look at viral marketing, beginning with a short overview of the history and evolution of the viral marketing term. As well as, differences between connected terms, such as marketing buzz, are explored. The book provides a viral marketing toolkit and explores the use of each tool in social media. Viral advertising, as a significant tool and source of viral message, is discussed in detail and examples of various companies' viral campaigns are described. The discussion also focuses on how and where businesses can post messages with viral objectives and which consumer segment is the focus of the initial targeting initiative. How to contend with negative viral campaigns is another topic of interest debated in the text.

This book is intended for a broad audience, including students, and professors in business and communication schools as well as marketing practitioners. The purpose of the book is to clarify the viral marketing term and discuss the key points related to the successful creation and management of a viral marketing campaign.

Keywords

advertising appeals, buzz marketing, market mavens, message seeding, social media, social network, user generated content, viral advertising, viral marketing, word-of-mouth, word-of-mouth

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Preface

In an article with the title “The death of advertising,” Rust and Oliver (1994) predicted that by 2010, new media would represent the dominant paradigm in marketing. They noted that the Internet would allow for an instant, direct, and interactive relationship between producers and consumers, while advertising would make the transition from involuntary to voluntary. In the new media, consumers are in control and make the choice about media selection and information tools and platforms to be used for commercial information (Keller 2009).

Although traditional marketing and advertising are still very much alive, research and statistics show that traditional media such as TV, radio, and print are losing ground in front of the new technologies, websites, social media, and mobile media. Viral marketing has become one of the most significant marketing trends of the recent years, with big brands and small companies taking advantage of the viral potential of the Internet (Ferguson 2008).

Technology and other factors have significantly evolved and positively affect the way consumers use communications, favoring rapid and efficient information exchange and interactivity (Godin 2000; Johnson et al. 2006). The wide use of the Internet has helped managers realize the potential of a new technology able to complement the traditional word-of-mouth communication, transforming it into an online viral way of communication with and among consumers (Datta et al. 2005). The Internet allows significantly more interaction, targeted communication, increased reach, and better results evaluation, all at a low cost (Kozinets et al. 2010).

Researchers and practitioners have noted that consumers seem increasingly comfortable with online viral advertising campaigns that encourage individuals to pass along a marketing message to others by Internet or e-mail. World-renowned companies, such as Nike, Budweiser, Ford, GMC, Levi’s, and De Beers have successfully used viral advertising in social media, YouTube, Facebook, and blogs. Classic viral video advertisements were

initially very good TV commercials, like Honda's "Cog" or Budweiser's "Whassup" campaign, followed by online only highly successful initiatives, such as the quintessential campaign "Subservient Chicken" video for Burger King's chicken sandwich, which got hundreds of millions of visits (Wasserman 2009). We also have the model example of Hotmail and viral marketing. The company successfully promoted their free e-mail service by including a message in each sent e-mail from Hotmail, noting that it is a free service available to anyone. Consumers can remember the Mentos-Coke "explosion" videos that generated millions of views, at-home experiments, and significant buzz on the topic.

Research has shown that, from definitive marketing platforms to Internet and new media, consumers value the noncommercial, nonimposed, personal sources of marketing information, peer-to-peer communication much better than the paid communications (Gilly et al. 1998; Kirby and Marsden 2006). Statistics concerning Internet and social media usage by consumers paint a great picture for online marketing. In 2012, nearly one-third of U.S. online adults accessed the Internet multiple times per day and from multiple physical locations last year, as stated by a Forrester survey (Forrester Research 2012a). The advantages of Internet usage come from classic computer users and from the new mobile devices. Moreover, the frequency and depth of usage of the Internet continue to grow, according to the "The state of consumers and technology: Benchmark 2012, United States" report from Forrester Research (2012b). The report shows that more consumers go online on a daily basis, and they connect on more devices than in previous years. In 2012, half of online adults owned a smartphone, and two-thirds own multiple connected devices and the tablet adoption rate has more than doubled since 2011. Moreover, the Internet was accessed even on their TV sets by more than four out of ten adults.

Nevertheless, the online marketing potential, especially in social media and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, is unlimited. In 2013 there were more than 1 billion unique users visiting YouTube each month, over 6 billion hours of video watched each month, and more than 100 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute. In addition, in 2013, Facebook was counting approximately 700 million daily active users, and 1.5 billion monthly active users.

Despite the growing trend and importance of new media and new marketing, studies regarding viral marketing and social media are relatively sparse, the information is rather disorganized, and there is still a limited understanding of the viral characteristics and planning strategy (Borroff 2000). Previous research has noted the necessity to study the nature, characteristics, and evaluation methods of viral marketing as the most efficient use of commercial communications with and among consumers. Under these circumstances, it is beneficial for researchers and practitioners to analyze how viral marketing works, what its tools and characteristics are, and, basically, how we can create a successful viral marketing campaign.

The purpose of this book is to organize and clarify the key information about viral marketing in order to help marketing researchers, practitioners, small business owners, and students understand the advantages and benefits of using viral campaigns, as well as what it takes to create such a strategy. We begin by clarifying the term *viral marketing* and its origins, and by focusing on what viral marketing campaigns have in common with real life viruses. The relationship between word-of-mouth, buzz, and viral campaigns is analyzed. We then focus on what sits at the foundation of viral marketing: the social network and how it promotes the viral diffusion of information at significant speed and for a low cost. While the book focuses mostly on practical aspects related to marketing campaigns, we present some of the key theories that are at the base of viral marketing, including the social network theory and laws.

After an overview of social networks, we analyze and present the key elements and aspects important in the creation, management, and evaluation of viral marketing campaigns: media platforms, key tools, characteristics, and types of viral campaigns, the target categories of consumers, as well as the evaluation of viral results. We take into consideration key viral characteristics—the viral factor included in both commercial content and the more modern user generated content. We focus on two hybrid types of viral marketing campaigns, the hybrid strategy that combines traditional and viral marketing tools, as well as the nonbranded online campaigns. Viral advertising, one of the key components of new marketing, is the focus of another chapter of the book, including the main advertising appeals that contribute to creating viral ads. The types of consumers that

are more prone to be involved in the diffusion of viral marketing communication and different information placement options are discussed. The book focuses on the more pragmatic and quantitative part of a viral marketing strategy, its objectives and how to monitor and evaluate the results. Last, but not least, we present an overview of an aspect often overlooked by marketers, the negative viral campaigns, which might present not only image issues, but also opportunities for marketers.

This book should benefit and bring useful information to a broad audience, including marketing practitioners, students, and professors in business and communication schools, as well as business managers interested in promoting their business through the new marketing and new media tools.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my mentor, Dr. Pradeep Korgaonkar, for his support and encouragement regarding my research work. I am grateful to my husband Viorel, for being there for me and for his help and ideas. I also want to express my gratitude to my parents, Rodica and Ioan Petrescu, and my grandmother, Ileana Ciresan, for everything they have done for me. Special thanks to my son, Dan, for being nice and letting mommy work. Last, but not least, many thanks to my great editor, Dr. Victoria Crittenden.

CHAPTER 1

Viral Marketing

The key information that can be derived from the term *viral marketing* is its relation to a virus. The similarities with real life viruses come from the fact that marketing information gets spread just like a virus from a person infected with the “virus” of commercial content who decides to spread it to the members of his or her social network. In this case, consumers willingly send the message to others, no matter if it is an e-mail, blog, video, advertisements, commercial newsletters, or web links to various marketing content.

Birth of a Virus

The origin of the term viral marketing is attributed to Jurvetson and Draper (1997), in an article taking Hotmail as an example. The authors used the term viral marketing to describe the free e-mail service that Hotmail was providing. At the time Hotmail, a free e-mail service, attached a clickable URL to every message sent by a user, underlining the advantage of its free services. In this manner, the users became a communication tool through which other consumers found out about the service and received free immediate access. By using this marketing strategy, Hotmail reached 12 million customers in 18 months (Dobele et al. 2005). Professor Rayport of Harvard is also cited as mentioning the term in 1996, and research mentions an earlier use of the term in 1989, in a *PC User* magazine article about Macintosh (Kirby and Marsden 2006; Shukla 2010). Since then, many companies have successfully used viral campaigns to promote their message, from the classical Old Spice and Budweiser viral advertisements, to the flash-mob dancing activities organized by T-Mobile in well-known train stations in top European and American cities. Currently, there are approximately 5.3 trillion display ads shown online each year, 400 million tweets sent daily, 144,000 hours

of YouTube video uploaded daily, and 4.75 billion posts shared on Facebook every day (Libert and Tynski 2013).

Jurvetson and Draper (1997) defined viral marketing as online word-of-mouth which is transmitted and promoted through the use of social networks. The authors considered viral marketing as word-of-mouth enhanced by social networks. Viral marketing includes marketing strategies that use electronic media to obtain word-of-mouth referral endorsements from one customer to pass on to other prospective customers, with the purpose of transmitting favorable marketing information made available online (Dobele et al. 2005). The key point is the use of social networks to transmit commercial information and to create a widespread diffusion potential for any marketing message, leading to exponential growth in the dispersion of the message.

Welker defined viral communication as “strategies that allow an easier, accelerated, and cost reduced transmission of messages by creating environments for self-replicating, exponentially increasing diffusion, spiritualization, and impact of the message” (Welker 2002, 4). Viral marketing is “a marketing strategy that encourages consumers to pass along messages to others in order to generate added exposure” (Plummer et al. 2007, 263) or business “activities to make use of customers’ communication networks to promote and distribute products” (Helm 2000, 158), all through the use of the Internet and, in particular, social networks.

Besides the exploitation of the benefits of social networking, another key point related to viral marketing is the necessity to offer consumers an incentive to pass the message along to their social networks. These incentives usually come from the entertainment potential of the marketing message, in particular, with regard to viral advertisements, but there can also be material and financial incentives in the form of discounts, entries into sweepstakes, or other rewards. As practice has shown, marketing messages need to be innovative, distinct, creative, and generally out-of-the-box to generate consumer interest and the intention to forward them to family and friends.

Successful viral marketing campaigns have specific characteristics and content that encourage individuals to pass along marketing and commercial messages to members of their social networks, creating an

exponentially growing potential for diffusion. Viral marketing needs to include a different, catchy message (blog, newsletter, video, and so on) in the online context, especially in the social media environment. Once released, the diffusion of the message is expected to grow organically, and, just like a virus, become contagious and quickly spread among consumers. Viral marketing helps businesses build a new customer base and improve their brand image with very low costs through consumer-to-consumer communication. It is based on the concept of motivating commercial message receivers to pass the message to members of their network, creating the potential for exponential growth of the message's capacity for diffusion and effectiveness.

Successful viral campaigns regularly produce more than 1 million impressions, with standouts that can reach tens or hundreds of times the number of impressions. Moreover, viral marketing messages often reach the mainstream media, and receive free exposure on television, radio, and in the print media (Libert and Tynski 2013). Research has also shown that customers who are acquired via viral campaigns and word-of-mouth are significantly more profitable in the long term than customers who are acquired via traditional advertising and promotion (Petersen et al. 2009).

In conclusion, we define viral marketing as online and offline marketing activities performed to influence consumers to transmit commercial messages and content to other consumers in their social network (Petrescu and Korgaonkar 2011). Viral marketing has distinct characteristics such as word-of-mouth that make it different from other concepts. Viral marketing includes online marketing strategies and actions with the purpose of identifying consumers who will forward, usually in its original form, the commercial message to members of their social network, to create widespread (viral) peer-to-peer diffusion. As discussed in this book, viral marketing can take the form of different marketing tools and techniques. The most well-known and used form of viral marketing includes viral advertising, creating advertisements that are creative, entertaining, or shocking enough to persuade consumers to share them with their peers. However, there are also other tools that we analyze, such as blogs, social media posts, and updates and newsletters.

When discussing the life cycle of viruses, in the medical sense, research notes a few key and basic stages of evolution, including exposure of host,

viral entry, viral replication, viral shedding, and viral latency. Exposure of host and viral entry assume that the virus enters the host through different ways because of favorable circumstances, such as contact with an infected host. To replicate, the virus needs to take control of the host cell's replication mechanisms, involving factors such as susceptibility and permissibility. After control is established and the environment is set for the virus to begin making copies of itself, replication occurs quickly by the million. The shedding phase comes from the fact that, after a virus has made many copies of itself, it has usually exhausted the cell of its resources and must find a new host (Dimmock et al. 2007).

In this book we discuss the key phases and influences in the evolution of the marketing virus and focus on the online environment and social networks as potential circumstances that positively affect the exposure of the host and potential viral entry. The book then reviews key viral marketing elements, tools, content, and advertising appeals that can affect the host's susceptibility and permissibility and allow the virus to "take control" of consumers. We focus on factors involved in the replication and shedding phases, when the virus spreads from consumer to consumer, and discuss favoring factors such as interpersonal sources and the involvement of market mavens.

Word-of-Mouth, Buzz, and Viral

Although some researchers and marketing practitioners might use the term viral marketing interchangeably with word-of-mouth, buzz, or viral advertising, in the following we discuss the key aspects that differentiate these marketing tools and ways of communication. Some of the most used terms in the new marketing paradigm include word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth (or word-of-mouse), and buzz marketing.

Word-of-Mouth

Arndt defined word-of-mouth as oral, individual-to-individual communication, related to a brand, product, or service, between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as noncommercial (Arndt 1967). Word-of-mouth represents a consumer-to-consumer personal

conversation about products or brands, usually between peers, without the interference of commercial and marketing entities. Given the personal characteristic and the level of trust placed by consumers on what other consumers have to say, word-of-mouth is one of the most significant ways of exchanging consumption information.

Different from other types of communication, traditional word-of-mouth uses personal communication from one person to another by using different media, unpaid, voluntary, and a consequence of personal initiatives (Datta et al. 2005; Gelb and Sundaram 2002). In opposition to commercial communication, word-of-mouth embodies an informal form of transmitting information between members of the same social circle, such as family, friends, and consumers, based on personal consumer experiences with companies, brands, and products. Word-of-mouth is unpaid, interpersonal, traditional verbal communication between consumers representing opinions, attitudes, and experiences in relation to brands, products, and businesses.

Word-of-mouth happens naturally among consumers as a result of marketing activities, market innovations, advertising, promotions, and, in general, any type of direct consumer experiences. Practice has shown that, usually, positive word-of-mouth is the result of pleasant consumer experiences with products, brands, and organizations, whereas negative word-of-mouth is the result of consumer dissatisfaction. Word-of-mouth has a higher influence on consumers in the case of low differentiation products or brands and advertising evaluations, when individuals are more likely to evaluate and purchase a product because of information received through word-of-mouth (Larceneux 2007).

Perceived source reliability and credibility are important advantages of word-of-mouth, as the information is assumed to come from personal experience and with no financial rewards or outcomes. Moreover, word-of-mouth is an interactive communication between consumers, with no commercial intent to control the attitudes or behaviors of other individuals. Because of its personal nature and being an unpaid, nonsponsored form of communication, word-of-mouth has a higher impact than commercial strategies on information dissemination and on consumer buying behavior, in particular, in the promotion of low-differentiation and new products (Bayus 1985; Keller 2007). In this case, individuals feel more

connected to their peer who shares a personal experience, because of the “people like me” perception (Allsop et al. 2007).

Regarding the differences between word-of-mouth and viral marketing, practice shows that traditional word-of-mouth is usually local and slow, whereas viral marketing uses the online platform, can be personal or impersonal, and has an exponential diffusion potential because of the use of social networks and social media. Another difference between viral marketing and word-of-mouth is related to cause and effect, as viral marketing has the capacity to generate word-of-mouth. Therefore, positive word-of-mouth can be the effect of viral marketing (Petrescu and Korgaonkar 2011). Although word-of-mouth is as old as consumption, it too has adapted to new communication platforms and technologies. Electronic word-of-mouth is an important aspect in the new media, efficiently using modern tools such as e-mail, blogs, and social media.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth, or word-of-mouse (Breazeale 2009) in more modern terms, is word-of-mouth that uses the Internet, and includes positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former customers about a company, brand, or product (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Given the use of the Internet and of social media, electronic word-of-mouth has a higher viral potential than its traditional form, because of advantages coming from the use of different communication platforms, such as reviews, blogs, e-mail, social media, and chat rooms.

Because it has a rather public form and it uses online platforms, electronic word-of-mouth can be less personal than its traditional form. It can be subject to more control, interaction, and intervention from businesses, in particular, in the case of reviews and customer evaluations. As a result of its online characteristics, consumers now have access to the opinions of the members of their social circle and to online reviews and opinions from experts or unknown individuals. Although it provides confidentiality for reviewers and has the advantage of online diffusion, it can be subjected to more commercial and business control or financially rewarded “consumer” communications.

Viral marketing includes activities performed by managers and marketers to create and transmit viral commercial messages, while electronic word-of-mouth can be one of the effects of a viral marketing strategy. The result is consumer-to-consumer communication that is encouraged by businesses.

Buzz Marketing

Buzz marketing refers to “the amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties through their passive or active influence” (Thomas 2004, 64). It includes all marketing efforts with the purpose of identifying consumers to transmit information related to new products or brand experiences. Regarding its relationship to viral marketing, there are a few differences encountered in research and practice. While viral marketing applies to the electronic media and especially social media, buzz marketing can use different platforms and tools, including traditional word-of-mouth or physical interaction (Swanepoel et al. 2009). Consumer buzz, or widespread market communication about a certain commercial topic, can be an output or consequence of viral marketing. In this case, consumer buzz is based on a commercial message from a business, is the output of a marketing activity that leads to communication from consumer to consumer. Consumer buzz can include professional expert opinions, including materially motivated and user-generated content by consumers.

The main characteristics of viral marketing that make it a distinct strategy compared to traditional marketing campaigns and other modern marketing terms and tools, are:

- Initial posting of the marketing message by the brand on a variety of online platforms.
- The transmission of the message from user to user.
- Distinct appeals and entertainment qualities that make consumers like the message and forward it to their social network.
- Creative, provocative, and out-of-the-box content of the viral marketing message.
- Use of the advantages, diffusion potential, and low-costs of social networks.

CHAPTER 2

The Social Network

The key characteristic at the base of viral marketing and its success is represented by the efficient use of social networks. Viral marketing is based on the expectation that consumers will like or find interesting the marketing message in a significant proportion as to entice them to forward it to members of their social network: family, peers, friends, co-workers, and online acquaintances. Its advantage stems from the high power and influence social networks have today as a result of the Internet and the widespread use of social media.

Social networks are especially efficient for viral marketing campaigns because they allow for the distribution of commercial messages with viral potential and characteristics; they are also useful for marketers in targeting specific influential members of the network. Because individuals have different roles and positions within social networks, identifying the key influencers and leaders of a social network can work to the benefit of marketers when they try to launch a message.

We discuss the key theoretical and practical aspects related to social networks, some of the best known laws that govern social networks, and their capacity to exponentially increase the diffusion of information. This is important especially in the exposure phase of consumers to the viral message, when social networks allow for increased access to potentially viral marketing content.

Social Network Theory

Social network theory underlines the fact that networks can be specified in terms of patterns of behavior and implications of the relationships between their members (Wasserman and Faust 1994). Social network theory can be used in predicting network behavior, structure, and operations (Schultz-Jones 2009). It seeks to explain how networks work, analyzes the

complex set of relationships within a network of individuals or organizations, and views the attributes of individuals as less important than their relationships and ties with other actors within the network (Granovetter 1983; Scott 2000).

The key differences between a social network explanation and the other sociological explanations of a process are the concepts of and information about relationships among units in a study. A corresponding concept, social network analysis, is the methodology used to research network behavior. Social network analysis views social relationships in terms of nodes and ties: nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. It studies networks as a function of different indices, including direction, frequency of relations, size, centrality, and density.

Mark Granovetter popularized an information diffusion model focused on the strength of weak ties that serve as bridges between network segments (Granovetter 1983). Strong ties express the reciprocal social relationships, whereas weak ties refer to loosely connected individuals. Tie strength depends on different factors such as frequency of contact, reciprocity, and friendship, the importance that individuals attach to the ties, the intimacy of the communications, and the emotional intensity of the ties.

As mentioned by Granovetter, weak ties create more opportunities for individuals to share information, interact, and expand their network and lead to greater levels of social capital. At the same time, as ties strengthen, individuals tend to become members of more dependent and related social circles, with less contact with other groups. Individuals are more likely to avoid making new contacts and entering other nonrelated networks. Weak ties, such as acquaintances and casual friends, are considered important in making connections between groups and sharing information within and between social groups.

Evidently, social networks existed way before the development of online communications and comprised members of the same social circles such as family, peers, co-workers, and schoolmates; however, the launch of the online environment created new opportunities. Researchers have underlined the constantly developing extent of network interaction, especially in online settings and virtual communities. Ever since the creation of computers and Intranet and Internet networks, individuals and

organizations have organized themselves in online social networks with new communication and interaction opportunities. This applies to viral networks because the spread of viral information in the community is achieved through these networks (Tuten 2008).

Social networks are considered important in the word-of-mouth literature. Researchers found that social networks and social ties are important in information dissemination and propagation, including both weak and strong ties (Brown and Reingen 1987; Goldenberg et al. 2001). Social networks promoted by social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, allow the establishment of links connecting family members, friends, and peers. Strong ties have higher influence within the group, are more likely to be used as sources of information, and perceived as more credible than weak ties. Weak ties allow and promote the dissemination of information between groups, whereas strong ties are much more influential in word-of-mouth, referral behavior and promote the flow of communication between the members of a group (Brown and Reingen 1987). In the case of word-of-mouth and viral communication between consumers, strong ties represent the key influential points in the group with constant social influence on consumer choices as stable and permanent socialization agents, whereas weak ties allow individuals to extend their information sources to outside groups at certain moments and under specific conditions.

Because Granovetter estimated that stronger ties lead to greater credibility of the sender, we can expect that consumers will put a greater value on word-of-mouth and referrals coming from persons with strong ties within their social networks. Moreover, the electronic word-of-mouth literature also found that stronger and more credible sources lead to more e-mails from these sources being opened, read, and forwarded. Consumers trust their strong ties more than their weak ties; so the strong ties greatly influence consumers' purchase decisions (Chiu et al. 2007). Persons with stronger ties tend to communicate more often, which makes them prone to sharing consumption information and marketing content. In addition, researchers found that most individuals do not forward information to persons they do not know, socially or virtually. Moderately and highly connected respondents are more likely to forward marketing messages (Huang et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2007).

The diffusion of information for viral content also depends on the type of network (such as social centric communities [Facebook], content sharing social networks [YouTube], or different types of communication networks [Twitter]), and specialized networks, professional or topic based [LinkedIn, Pinterest]) and the degree of formalized links and connections among the network members. Moreover, specific characteristics of online social networks, such as synchrony, encourage members of a social network to share information. Synchrony depicts the fact that a large group of people, sometimes, tends to perform similar actions in response to a contextual trigger (Choudhury and Sundaram 2009). This might include commenting, sharing, and awarding “likes” to specific content and information as a result of the influence of other group members who exhibit the same behavior and attitudes.

Nevertheless, as a result of new technologies, the impact of social networks for viral marketing is significant. A person who forwards an e-mail marketing message to a few friends can make a small impact in the marketplace, especially if some friends decide to share it too. However, if the same marketing message is posted in a social network such as Facebook, which encourages information sharing and diffusion, the distribution of the message grows exponentially (Tuten 2008). Next, we present a short overview of well-known laws and theories related to the functioning and, especially, the effects of social networks.

Network Laws and Benefits

Viral marketing capitalizes on the advantages of social networks, including their high capacity for diffusion of information. In this sense, there are a couple of laws and theories relating to the utility of networks and other aspects such as the critical mass of connectivity required for a network to be valuable.

Metcalfé's Law

Metcalfé's Law, which states that the utility of a network is proportional to the square of numbers of users, underlines the viral marketing benefits from the network output. Metcalfé's Law states that the value of

a communications network is proportional to the square of the number of connected users of the system. Metcalfe's Law is related to the fact that the number of unique connections in a network of a number of nodes (n) can be expressed mathematically as the triangular number " $n(n-1)/2$," which is proportional to n^2 . In its initial form, for example, if we take five computers, the most number of connections that can be made is 10, as it can be seen in Figure 2.1. Metcalfe's Law was publicized under this name by George Gilder in 1993. Gilder attributed the formula to Robert Metcalfe, who had discussed networks not in terms of users, but in terms of compatible communicating devices, specifically Ethernet purchases and connections (Gilder 1993; Metcalfe 1973). After the spread of the Internet across the world, the law was considered in the context of the Internet, of social networks and their users, and even to explain the World Wide Web.

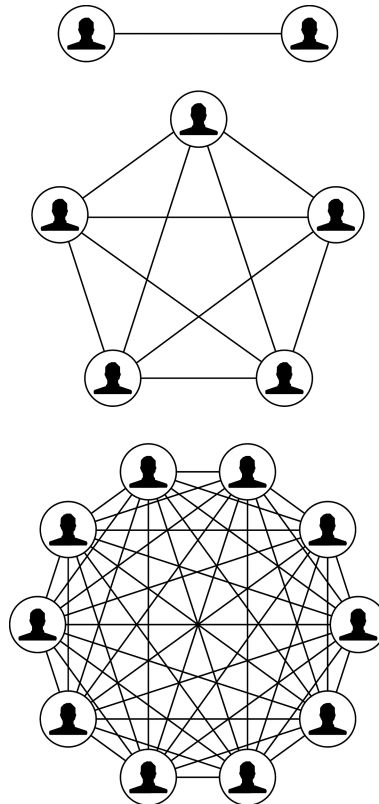


Figure 2.1 Network connections under Metcalfe's law

With regard to social networks, the law was adapted to reflect an “ $n \cdot \log_n$ ” proportionality. Metcalfe’s Law points to a critical mass of connectivity after which the benefits of a network grow larger than its costs. Metcalfe has noted that social networks form around what might be called affinities, and if the number of people sharing an affinity is above a critical mass, then their social network might, especially with the Internet, become much more accessible to individuals (Metcalfe 2006). This can be used in analyzing the viral diffusion potential of online social networks. We can consider that the 12 to 17 year-old Facebook users have an average of 506 friends, while the average number of friends for all Facebook users aged 12 and up is around 300 (Edison Research 2013). Moreover, the typical teen Twitter user has 79 followers. Girls tend to have substantially larger Facebook friend networks compared with boys and older teens more than younger teens (Madden et al. 2013). In this case, the greater the number of users with Facebook, the more valuable the service becomes to the marketers intending to launch viral materials. With each friend added to the social network of an individual, its value increases exponentially.

Moore’s Law

Metcalfe noted that there is a critical mass of connectivity after which the benefits of a network grow larger than its costs and recommended using a combination of Metcalfe’s and Moore’s Laws. This combination refers to the fact that the number of users at which a network’s value exceeds its cost halves every two years.

Moore’s Law refers to remarks made in 1965 by Gordon Moore, cofounder of Intel. Moore observed that the number of transistors per square inch on integrated circuits had doubled every year since the integrated circuit was invented and predicted that this trend would continue for the foreseeable future (Moore 1965). Outside of its strict technological focus, Moore’s Law applies to the capabilities of many digital electronic devices, from computers to digital cameras. These improve exponentially and create significant technological innovations in the market. As Metcalfe wrote, the law can be used in analyzing and forecasting

the development and impact of social media because of its close relation with new technologies.

Reed's Law

Reed's Law states that the utility of large networks, specifically of social networks, can increase exponentially with the size of the network. According to Reed, the number of possible subgroups of a social network's participants is " $2^n - n - 1$," where n represents the number of participants (Reed 2001). Its potential for diffusion of information grows much more rapidly than the number of network members or the number of possible connections between members, as stated by Metcalfe's Law, because of the network effect created by potential group membership.

Moore noted the existence of three types of networks: the one-to-many (broadcast) network, the individual-to-individual (transactional network), and the many-to-many (group-forming) network. The group-forming network is considered the most valuable with the highest growth potential and impact because it allows network members to form and maintain communicating groups. An example in this case is represented by online communities, which serve as communication platforms that can significantly contribute to diffusing the viral message even more than broadcasts on transactional networks.

Beckstrom's Law

Beckstrom's Law is an economics model stating that the value of a network for its users equals the sum of the net value added to each user's transactions conducted through the respective network, summed over all users, less the net present value of the costs of all transactions on the network over any given period of time (Beckstrom 2009). The users are defined as all parties doing transactions on that network.

This law can be applied to the valuation of any type of network, including social and electronic networks. From this point of view, one way of evaluating the value added by the network to each transaction is to assume that the network activities stop and, in this case, assess what

the additional transactions costs or loss would be. Beckstrom's Law differs from other related network laws in that it does not base its evaluation only on the size of the network.

Dunbar's Number

Research has noted that Reed's Law and Metcalfe's Law overstate network value because they do not take into account the impact of human cognitive limits on network formation and value. Dunbar's Number compensates for cognitive limits and underlines the fact that there is a maximum number of social connections that an individual can manage (Dunbar 1992). Dunbar's Number focuses on stable social relationships, where individuals know who each person is and how each member relates to every other person in the network. This does not include individuals that are no longer in touch nor acquaintances that are not in frequent social contact with the subject. Researchers noted that the number of stable social connections individuals can manage is between 100 and 230 with an average of 150.

Six (or Less) Degrees of Separation

Six degrees of separation is a theory stating that every person is six or fewer steps away, considering their social contacts, from any other person in the world. Originally discussed by Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy, the theory was tested and analyzed by other authors, including Gurevich and Milgram (Gurevich 1961; Milgram 1967). In 2003, Columbia University conducted the first large-scale replication of Milgram's experiment, in a web-based environment. Their effort was named the Columbia Small World Project and included 24,163 e-mail chains. Results about the mean chain length confirmed Milgram's finding of six degrees of separation (Dodds 2003). Of course, the theory was made very popular by the game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon," invented with the goal to link any actor to Kevin Bacon through no more than six connections, where two actors are connected if they have appeared in a movie or commercial together.

More recently, studies have analyzed the theory in connection with social networks. In the context of Facebook, research found that six degrees overstates the number of links between typical pairs of users and found an average distance of 4.74 degrees (Backstrom 2011). Other researchers analyzed the theory and its applicability on Twitter and concluded that the average distance of 1,500 random users in Twitter is 3.435, calculated by using all the active users on Twitter (Bakhshandeh et al. 2011).

Whereas the valuation of a social network differs as a function of the formula used, as we have seen in the previously discussed laws and theories, the agreement among researchers and practitioners is that the potential for viral diffusion of information is significantly increased in networks than in person-to-person communication. One of the key platforms in this sense is represented by online social media, a topic that will be further discussed.

Related to *Viral Marketing and Social Networks*, there are a few key points that should be considered related to social networks and their benefits:

- Tie strength depends on different factors such as frequency of contact, reciprocity, and friendship.
- Weak ties create more opportunities for individuals to share information between groups.
- Strong ties allow members to interact within more dependent and related social circles.
- The diffusion of information in social networks happens exponentially and has significantly higher potential than traditional communication.

CHAPTER 3

Viral Marketing Media

The eMarketer estimated that online video advertising in the United States would increase from \$1.1 billion in 2009 to \$4.1 billion in 2013, with online advertising spending rising from 4.3 percent to 11.0 percent of the overall advertising expenditures (Tsai 2009). U.S. mobile ad spending on social networks is estimated to reach \$4.5 billion by 2018 (Forrester Research 2013a). In Europe, social media marketing spending is estimated to be about €3.2 billion in 2017, up from €1.4 billion in 2012, according to Forrester's 2013 European social media marketing forecast (Forrester Research 2013b). The study found that social media adoption in Europe has not yet reached saturation levels and estimated that more than 70 percent of the online population across Western Europe would be engaged by social networks by 2017, up from 63.4 percent in 2013.

Regarding consumers' preferences for direct marketing channels, consumers' preferences for e-mail have dropped 21 percent since 2008, whereas their preference for social media has grown 10 percent (ExactTarget 2012). Moreover, 33 percent of consumers stated that they used Facebook to share content with friends and family, with blogs, online forums, and another 18 percent stated that they used other social media websites (Pinterest, Tumblr, Instagram, LinkedIn). In the teen age group, 78 percent use Facebook, and 32 percent used Twitter at least once per day (ExactTarget 2012). Teenagers reported that they have individuals that they have not met in their social network (33 percent) and celebrities such as musicians and athletes (30 percent) (Madden et al. 2013).

By investing in social media campaigns, marketers will take advantage of the full viral potential and low costs and will be able to build equity among social media users, which will minimize risk and allow brands to be considered friends, with higher trust and credibility. Given the importance of social media for viral marketing, as well as its predicted

development over the future years, it is important to analyze the key players in the social media field.

Social Media Platforms

As a result of the widespread use of social media, all marketing information now has the opportunity to spread rapidly online from consumer to consumer through websites such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Whereas a large percentage of social media users belong to the younger generation, an increasing number of users at the sites are older people who want more easily to connect with people (Anderson 2008; Keller 2007). Social media improves consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand interaction, improves brand relationships, can extend the exposure time for a brand's message, and can significantly increase the diffusion potential for a marketing message (Tuten 2008).

Researchers have noted that, through all their tools, social networks invite participation and promote interaction, transforming users into creators and strangers into friends (Barefoot and Szabo 2010). Users no longer have a passive role, and communication is no longer just bidirectional. Social media brought significant changes in the individuals' abilities to communicate their ideas, opinions, and experiences to other people (Riegner 2007).

Social media include a broad range of online venues, including online social networks, virtual worlds, social video websites, photo communities, and social news websites. Marketers can benefit from the use of different social media platforms, including social networks (Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace), content sharing websites (YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr), virtual worlds (Second Life), and social news sites (Digg and del.icio.us). Websites such as YouTube and Flickr focus on the sharing and promotion of videos, photos, and related comments, whereas social networks such as Facebook support relationship building and maintenance. Some social websites, such as the professional networking website LinkedIn, allow for self-promotion.

Tuten discusses two different types of social networks: (1) egocentric and (2) object-centric. An egocentric social network, such as Facebook or LinkedIn, places the individual at the core of the network experience

and promotes networking and interaction between individuals based on social reasons and affinities. The object-centric networks, such as YouTube for videos, Flickr for photographs, and Digg for news, place content at the center of the network (Tuten 2008). Regarding the spread of social media, a Pew Research study showed that 72 percent of online adults use social networking sites. Although younger adults continued to be the most likely social media users, a new trend showed a significant growth among older Internet users in recent years. Those aged 65 and above have roughly tripled their presence on social networking sites in the last 4 years—from 13 percent in the spring of 2009 to 43 percent in 2013 (Brenner and Smith 2013).

According to the eBizMBA Rank, at the middle of 2013 the most popular networking sites were Facebook (estimated 750 million unique monthly visitors), Twitter (estimated 250 million unique monthly visitors), LinkedIn (estimated 110 million unique monthly visitors), Pinterest (estimated 85.5 million unique monthly visitors), MySpace (estimated 70.5 million unique monthly visitors), and Google Plus (estimated 65 million unique monthly visitors) (eBiz MBA 2013).

As stated by the GlobalWebIndex, the top social media sites worldwide, based on penetration of active users at the beginning of 2013 were Facebook (51 percent of Internet users), Google Plus (26 percent of Internet users), YouTube (25 percent of Internet users), Twitter (22 percent of Internet users), and major Chinese local networks Sina Weibo (21 percent of Internet users), Qzone (21 percent of Internet users), Tencent (20 percent of Internet users), and Tencent Weibo (19 percent of Internet users) (eMarketer 2013). Among other local social networking websites, LinkedIn (8 percent of Internet users) and Pinterest (4 percent of Internet users) ranked in the top 15. We present an overview of the key global social networks, as seen in Table 3.1, and of some local and regional networks that have a large share of the international market.

Facebook

Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission was to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Individuals use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, receive and send

Table 3.1 Top social media websites

Website	Purpose	Advantages	Disadvantages	Usage estimations
Facebook	Stay connected with friends and family, receive and send news and updates	Widespread reach, diverse tools offered for marketers	Potential for spam and intrusion in personal space	Approx. 60% of active Internet users; 699 million daily active users
Google+	Share and exchange content such as links, videos, photos, events	The tools to analyze social activity and monitor a marketing message	Shared users with other Google platforms	359 million active users and a penetration of 26% among active Internet users
YouTube	Discover, watch, and share videos	High diffusion potential for viral videos at very low costs	Negative ads	1 billion unique visitors/month; 25% level of penetration of active Internet users
Twitter	Share real-time information within 140 characters of news allowed in each entry	The possibility to share fast and to a large community breaking news and company information	Potential for spam, intrusion in personal space and fake campaigns	22% penetration of active Internet users; 500 million registered users
LinkedIn	Engage in professional networking and formal communication	Company pages, interest groups, professional environment	More fit for business-to-business communication	225 million members in over 200 countries; 8% of worldwide active Internet users
Pinterest	Collect and share content related to individual hobbies and projects	Possibility for viral campaigns	Limited usage	4% of worldwide active Internet users
MySpace	Share tracks and videos and use as a digital music library	Opportunities for entertainment industry marketers	Niche social networking	53 million tracks and videos as a digital music library
Tumblr	Use for micro blogging and sharing text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos	Indexed webpage, good presence in search engines	Limited usage	134 million blogs and 59 billion posts

news and updates, as well as share opinions and experiences (Facebook 2013). Facebook offers marketers significant strategic value and usually ranks at the top of the most used social networks and has the highest penetration of Internet users among all social networks. It offers marketers numerous promotional tools, including targeted display ads and sponsored stories, business profiles known as Facebook Pages, and social news feed of brand-related user behavior called Beacon, with the potential to virally distribute commercial information about user brand-related activity (Tuten 2008).

As noted by midyear statistics for Facebook, the social network had 699 million daily active users on average for June 2013, an increase of 27 percent year-over-year and 1.15 billion monthly active users, an increase of 21 percent year-over-year (Facebook 2013). The company surpassed 1 million active advertisers on Facebook, driven by significant growth in local businesses, and when it introduced video for Instagram, it saw 5 million videos uploaded in the first 24 hours. Revenue for the second quarter of 2013 totaled \$1.81 billion, an increase of 53 percent, compared with \$1.18 billion in the second quarter of 2012. According to the 2013 Social Rich Media Benchmark Report, promoting Facebook posts by using a paid ad increases, not only organic views, but also viral reach significantly (ShopIgniter 2013).

Facebook's penetration of Internet active users is expected to reach 60 percent over 2013 (eMarketer 2013). Regarding usage, in the first quarter of 2013, watching videos on Facebook saw an increase of 47 percent compared to a year before, both on PC and mobile phones, and of 93 percent on tablets, followed by other significant numbers regarding sharing the link to an article (44 percent increase), following or liking a brand page (40 percent increase), and messaging with friends on a one-on-one basis (34 percent increase) (eMarketer 2013). Regarding sharing information with friends and family, 33 percent of Internet users said they used Facebook (ExactTarget 2012). Regarding teenage use, a survey from Pew Internet and America Life Project and Harvard's Berkman Center found that the average number of Facebook friends among teenagers is 425 (Knight 2013). Among teens, 78 percent used Facebook at least once a day, and 20 percent of them made purchases as a result of a marketing message received on Facebook (ExactTarget 2012).

Besides the significant use of Facebook by consumers, its other advantages include the diverse tools offered for marketers. From branded Facebook pages that companies can create, to all kinds of interactive tools, such as contests, polls, sweepstakes, and games, businesses have a variety of choices in interacting with Facebook users. Due to its widespread use, high degree of interactivity, and potential to involve consumers in an active relation to the brand, Facebook represents a great opportunity for viral marketing campaigns.

One of the key potential negative issues that marketers need to consider is represented by the limit that consumers assign in their relation to brands and receiving commercial messages on Facebook. Research found that nearly 40 percent of the consumers who click the like button on a company's Facebook page do not think that their action gives the company the right to market to them via the news feed (ExactTarget 2012). Consumers' top reasons for becoming Facebook fans of a branded page are similar to their reasons for subscribing to e-mail, including discounts and price promotions, free products, and receiving exclusive content (ExactTarget 2013). Whereas consumers want to interact with brands and appreciate the direct interaction mediated by Facebook, marketers need to pay attention to the potential for direct marketing messages to reach too far in the "personal space" of Facebook users.

Google+

Google+ is a social network owned and operated by Google Inc. It is considered the second-largest social networking site in the world, after Facebook, having surpassed Twitter in the first quarter of 2013. It has approximately 359 million active users and a penetration of 26 percent among active Internet users (eMarketer 2013). Google+ aims to make sharing on the web more like sharing in real life and facilitate the exchange of content such as links, videos, and photos. It presents different tools for its users, such as events and hangouts, and a way to differentiate among members of the social circle in the sharing process, through its contact organizing tool, Circles (Google+ 2013).

Google+ had more than one million business and brand pages created in the first six months after launch, and approximately 500 million

users, with 5 to 10 percent click-through rate uplift for socially-enhanced search ads (Google+ 2013). Some new tools that it brings for the benefit of marketers include Google+ Ripples' data visualization option, which shows users who is sharing their posts most often, who shared a post or URL, and the comments they made. For viral marketing, this tool allows marketers to identify influencers and analyze communities' reaction to marketing content.

In combination with the tools offered by Google, such as Google Analytics, marketers can check social reports that show how Google+ influences conversion, the impact of personalized recommendations, and what visitors from social networks are coming to the website. The key advantages presented by Google+ in the context of viral marketing are all the tools and options to analyze the social activity of a network and to monitor the evolution of a marketing message, as well as identify the key users, influencers, or market mavens of a social network.

Although the data show a widespread use of Google+ as a social network after Facebook, some statistics, such as the number of users, might be confounded with the use of other Gmail services. Another issue that might present both opportunities and challenges for marketers is the option for users to organize their contacts into different circles and share content only with specific circles. Although this option might present better opportunities for activity monitoring, it might also limit the spread of the message from an individual to specific groups of members of a social circle, instead of sharing it with all the members of its social network.

YouTube

Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch, and share originally-created videos (YouTube 2013). YouTube is especially used as a communication platform for user-generated content and viral videos; it is also a social network because it enables the development and maintenance of networks on the site (Tuten 2008). The website is considered a part of social media because it provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and get in touch with others across the globe. From the point of view of marketers, YouTube acts as a distribution platform

for original content creators and provides a low cost, high diffusion distribution platform for advertisers.

More than 1 billion unique users visit YouTube each month and over 6 billion hours of video are watched each month, an increase of 50 percent compared to 2012. According to statistics, 100 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. Whereas 70 percent of YouTube traffic comes from outside the United States, YouTube can be found in 56 countries and across 61 languages. Moreover, regarding its penetration, as shown by Nielsen, YouTube reaches more U.S. adults aged 18 to 34 than any cable network. With regard to the use of YouTube for advertising, statistics shows that thousands of advertisers are using TrueView in-stream and 75 percent of these in-stream ads can be skipped by consumers (YouTube 2013). ExactTarget (2012) found that 8 percent of consumers have been influenced to purchase a product or service by a video advertisement posted on YouTube, either as a commercial or as an advertisement played before the start of a video.

A study performed by GlobalWebIndex shows that YouTube, with a 25 percent penetration, is ranked third worldwide among social media sites for the level of penetration of active Internet users (eMarketer 2013). Likewise, 7 percent of teen Internet users have a profile or account on YouTube (Knight 2013). From the point of view of marketers, YouTube either allows them to distribute video advertisements online, or it helps companies to encourage the creation of user-generated content in relation to brands. One example of YouTube use is Smirnoff's "Tea Partay" video. Initially posted on a company site, it was reposted by fans on YouTube and viewed more than 1 million times (Tuten 2008). Another case is the consumer-generated ads campaign run by Doritos every year for the SuperBowl in YouTube's community area. Although the campaign uses both Facebook and YouTube for the ad competition, the main goal is for the ads to be shown during the SuperBowl. However, the top ads also receive millions of views on YouTube.

The key advantages of YouTube for marketers, especially for viral marketing, include the widespread use of the website and high diffusion potential for viral videos at very low costs. The success of numerous advertisements that collected so far millions of views proves the efficacy of the website. Moreover, the platform allows for user comments and

evaluations of the videos, which represents a good opportunity for marketers to gather feedback. Nevertheless, in conjunction with Google Plus, a social network owned by the same company, YouTube can prove a successful competitor to Facebook.

Some of the potential issues that YouTube might create for marketers include the creation of negative ads by consumers unsatisfied with the services of a company. However, this can also represent an opportunity for companies to receive feedback and provide resolution to consumer complaints, all under the watchful eye of millions of consumers. We further discuss this topic in a later chapter. This issue—the relative lack of control that marketers have with regard to consumer-generated content—shows a potential threat, especially on a widely viewed social network such as YouTube.

Twitter

Twitter is one of the top social networks, with a 22 percent penetration of active Internet users at the beginning of 2013 placing it fourth after Facebook, Google+, and YouTube (eMarketer 2013). It had 250 million estimated unique monthly visitors in 2013 (eBiz MBA 2013) and about 500 million registered users (ExactTarget 2012). Among teens, 32 percent use Twitter at least once a day, and 16 percent make a purchase as a result of a marketing message received on Twitter (ExactTarget 2012).

Twitter was founded in San Francisco, but the service is now available in more than 20 languages. Twitter (2013) is a real-time information network that connects users to stories, ideas, opinions, and news from users they find interesting, all in posts of just 140 characters. Users can see photos, videos, and conversations directly in Tweets. At the end of 2013, Twitter decided to become public and made the necessary decisions in this sense, including making an initial public offering (IPO) meant to avoid unnecessary issues and hassle as had initially happened with Facebook, whose stock price dropped significantly compared to their initial estimated price. The setting of a price range in November 2013 allowed the company to begin shopping its IPO, which is set to raise \$1 billion, directly from investors. On the opening day, the social-messaging platform opened at a very successful \$45.10 on the New York

Stock Exchange, up 73 percent from the \$26 initial public offering price. Twitter became the biggest U.S. technology IPO since Facebook went public 18 months previously.

From a marketer's point of view, Twitter presents the opportunity of connecting businesses to customers in real time and helps in sharing commercial information with individuals interested in brands, products, and services. Twitter allows businesses to collect information and feedback and build relationships with customers, partners, and influencers. Companies can use Twitter to release brand updates, news related to the launch of new products or about the company, and promotional content and ask for consumers' opinion regarding certain decisions.

The key advantages of Twitter include the possibility to share fast and with a large community breaking news and company information as well as manage a potential viral marketing campaign. It especially allows marketers to target social influencers that can further share information that can have an impact on other consumers' decisions. Some possible disadvantages can include consumers' preferences to avoid permission-based marketing messages via Twitter. For example, only 1 percent of consumers aged 18 to 24 prefer to receive permission-based marketing messages through this platform (ExactTarget 2012). Another issue is represented by the potential for fake or false news and information posted on Twitter, as proven by the widely seen false news regarding the death of some celebrities. Even Twitter recently used fake tweets to promote a new advertising service; it used a string of fake tweets from the accounts of real users to champion one of its products (The Guardian 2013).

LinkedIn

Officially launched in 2003, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network with 225 million members in over 200 countries around the globe (Tate 2013). LinkedIn attracts about 8 percent of worldwide active Internet users (eMarketer 2013). It allows for professional networking and formal communication among individuals and presents an opportunity for companies to create a company page and group pages to share information and connect with members interested in a respective business and activity. LinkedIn is a fast-growing professional networking site that allows

members to create business contacts, search for jobs, and find potential clients. Individuals can create their own professional profile that others in their network can view and view the profiles of their own contacts.

LinkedIn was a simple website for the first 7 years of its existence, but now it is a platform that includes five applications, including one that processes all consumer e-mail and tries to insert small-size LinkedIn profiles into every message. To compete with more established websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn is focused on its mobile tools. The company has released three applications in 2013, including the news-sharing system Pulse—a LinkedIn acquisition—an application for recruiters, and a contacts app (Tate 2013). In July 2013, LinkedIn announced their sponsored updates ad service. These allow individuals and companies to pay a fee to have LinkedIn sponsor their content and spread it to their user base, a common way for social media sites to generate revenue. However, LinkedIn is still considered rather a top business-to-business social network, instead of business-to-consumer network. Its users do not see it as a place for direct marketing messages and for commercial promotion, though 4 percent of consumers state that they made a purchase based on a marketing message received on LinkedIn (ExactTarget 2012).

Pinterest

Pinterest is a social platform launched in 2010 for collecting and sharing content related to individual hobbies and projects. It allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, and hobbies. Consumers can browse other pinboards for images, *repin* images to their own pinboards, or they can “like” photos from other sources. Pinterest allows businesses to create pages aimed at promoting their businesses online. Pinterest pages can serve as a *virtual storefront* and can include prices of products, ratings of movies, or ingredients for recipes.

According to research company Engauge, Pinterest helps people: get inspiration for their careers or hobbies (57 percent); store images of things they dream of having (53 percent); keep their thoughts and ideas organized (47 percent); and share their ideas with others (32 percent). One of Pinterest’s most distinctive characteristics is the kind of interaction the

platform invites between user and brand (Engauge Research 2013). It has a penetration of 4 percent in the category of worldwide active Internet users, which places it on 14th place worldwide in the social media sites category (eMarketer 2013). The online platform has approximately 46 million users in 2013.

Pinterest is perfect for displaying what customers like, what they already own, and what they want in the future; it also offers an efficient event planning and interior design tool that can help consumers with their wedding planning, birthday parties, vacations, and baby showers (Washington 2013). In 2013, the social networking and scrapbooking site, Pinterest, has seen its value jump by more than 50 percent to \$3.8 billion. Besides raising hundreds of millions from investment companies, Pinterest is looking at ways of monetizing its service. In 2013, the firm started testing the use of “promoted pins” as a possible form of advertising (BBC News 2013). As a social network, it presents the opportunity to encourage viral information, even though it is still developing and striving to attract users.

Pinterest is considered a powerful market research tool because it allows companies to learn more about their customers. As found by Pew Research, there was a 286 percent increase in Pinterest use from 2011 to 2012 (Washington 2013). Once a user promotes a pinned item on their board, their followers can repin to their own boards. This process of repinning can create a viral potential for the original content, with each repin creating a new, unique backlink from Pinterest to the site that provided the initial message or content. Each repin creates a new backlink. By using this website, an interesting piece of content that goes viral could generate thousands of unique backlinks to the site that originally displayed the content.

MySpace

Launched before the creation of Facebook, the website was *the* social network before Facebook started developing and became the top social network on the market. From 2005 until early 2008, MySpace was the most visited social networking site in the world and, in June 2006, overcame Google as the most visited website in the United States. However,

since 2008, with the launch of Facebook, the company has started losing users and was ranked very low among social media websites. Since then, the website was revamped, reinvented, and rebranded and had a relaunch in June 2013, focusing on a specific niche and social media domain.

MySpace is a social networking service with a strong music emphasis owned by Specific Media LLC and pop music singer and actor Justin Timberlake. It gives access to 53 million tracks and videos as a digital music library. The platform allows all artists—from musicians and designers to writers and photographers—to connect with audiences, collaborators, and partners. In the first months, it had approximately 13 thousand songs uploaded daily (Konrad 2013). According to owners Chris and Tim Vanderhook, 70 percent of the website's audience is under 34 years (Konrad 2013). The company had approximately 36 million users in October 2013.

Profiles from the old MySpace have been upgraded to the new platform so that members can log in using MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter profiles and access their content and connections. MySpace also delivers community Insights, an analytics suite that offers a set of visualized data reports telling artists how big their audience is, which fans are most influential, and the users' preferences and likes. The "new" social media website is still developing and evolving, however, for the moment, it can represent an opportunity for marketing professionals in the music industry and related businesses.

Tumblr

Tumblr is a microblogging and social networking website founded in 2007 that lets users share diverse content, text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos from computers and mobile sources. Users can follow other users' blogs as well as make their blogs private. In 2013, it had 134 million blogs and a total of 65 billion posts (Tumblr 2013). In the same year, the company was acquired by Yahoo for about \$1.1 billion.

Through the Tumblr dashboard, users are able to comment, reblog, and like posts from other blogs that appear on their dashboard. It allows the user to upload text content, images or videos, and post links to their blog. Consumers have the opportunity to connect their blogs to their

Twitter and Facebook accounts. Additionally, in 2013 Tumblr made the website more search friendly by introducing a new search feature that allows the consumer to use multiple tags and narrow the search field to more specific cross-categories. Tumblr provides networking benefits both for consumers and businesses and is an indexed website, which allows for a good presence in search engines besides the fact that users can customize their pages according to their preferences. Some of its disadvantages actually include increased competition on the micro blogging market as well as the relatively limited design options.

Top Chinese Social Networks

The top four social networks in China, Sina Weibo, Qzone, Tencent, and Tencent Weibo gather each about 20 percent of worldwide active Internet users and are present in the top 10 social media sites worldwide. With such a wide influence on the Chinese market, they represent a significant opportunity for marketers interested in the international environment and especially in the constantly growing Chinese consumer market with a significant demand for consumer goods and services (eMarketer 2013).

Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging website, representing a combination of Twitter and Facebook. When its basic version was launched in 2009, it represented a great investment opportunity, especially considering the circumstances on the Chinese market, when websites such as Facebook and Twitter were blocked. Created by Sina corporation, it is one of the most popular sites in China, used by about 21 percent of Internet users (eMarketer 2013). Launched by Sina in 2009, the website had over 500 million registered users in 2013. At the same time, about 100 million messages were posted each day on Sina Weibo. Sina Weibo incorporates most of the features offered by Twitter, including being able to post within a 140-character text limit, mention or talk to other users by using the same “@UserName” format, add hashtags, follow other people, or retweet other users’ posts. Official and third-party applications allow users to access Sina Weibo from other websites or platforms. Additionally, users are allowed to insert graphical emoticons or attach their own content, photos, music, or video files to every post. The website allows comments to each user post from other registered users. The company

is present on mobile platforms too and is developing its international website in English.

Qzone is a social networking website created by Tencent in 2005; it is placed at a penetration of about 21 percent of active Internet users. It allows users to write blogs, share photos, and listen to music. It has Asia's largest active social network user base with more than 600 million users who log in more than twice a month. Qzone was launched in 2005; it was initially planned as a Geocities-style blog community before the company decided to add social aspects by linking blogs to users' QQ accounts. The website did not face significant competition at that point because Facebook was not present in the market. The Qzone mobile application was released in early 2010 and included features like photo filters and the option to record voice memos. Whereas a typical Twitter or Tumblr user would take a photo, open it in a separate app to dress it up, then open the blogging app to post it, all of this could be done within Qzone's app, reducing the friction to post (Ho 2013). Qzone's owner, Tencent Inc., is the major player on the Chinese social media and Internet market. Founded in 1998, the company now owns numerous leading Internet platforms in China—QQ (QQ Instant Messenger), WeChat, QQ.com, QQ Games, Qzone, 3g.QQ.com, SoSo, Tencent Weibo, PaiPai, and Tenpay. Other large Chinese Internet companies that provide products and services similar to Tencent include Sina and Baidu.

Besides the already mentioned Qzone, the company also owns Tencent Weibo, a Chinese microblogging website launched in 2010 using the base concept of Twitter. It is estimated to reach about 19 percent of the global market of active Internet users (eMarketer 2013). Individuals can share photos, videos, and text with a 140-character limit by using the Internet, SMS, or smartphones. The website allows users to repost content from other users and reply to posts and encourages users to create new topics on their own.

Additional Social Media Websites

Whereas the most widely used and known online social networks list definitely starts with Facebook, there are other social media websites, most of them newer, who, just like Twitter or LinkedIn, are developing and

acquiring customers. Most of the new and developing social networks focus on specific consumer segments and on niche sectors of activity in order to attract users. Some of the newest examples include Medium, Nextdoor, Pheed, Thumb, Path, and many others.

Medium is a new invitation-only social network launched by the creator of Twitter. It includes a limited number of celebrity creators, though everyone can read and comment. Nextdoor is a social networking site that encourages real life interaction among neighbors. It requires a real address to sign up and then places the user in a local network with neighbors and peers.

Pheed is a pay-as-you-go social network launched in 2012 that especially targets celebrities, who can monetize their posts based on a monthly subscription fee. On the same note, there is the Upfront mobile application and BeUpfront website as new premium platforms that grant fans access to exclusive videos, text messages, e-mails, and other perks from influencers they follow, including actors, musicians, and even religious leaders. Thumb is a personal decision crowdsourcing website that allows users to post simple questions and photos and ask for thumbs up or thumbs down plus comments from other network users. Path is a private mobile social network that allows users to livestream with 150 close friends and contacts, focused primarily on sharing photos and allowing users to share other media and provide status updates.

Mobile Platforms

Despite the significant use of e-mail for personal and marketing communication, consumers still maintain a significant presence with text messaging and mobile communications, with an increase of 20 percent in 2012 compared to 2008. Regarding personal communication, 36 percent of consumers considered text messages their preferred channel, while 5 percent stated that they prefer it for permission-based promotions. Furthermore, 57 percent of consumers used text messaging daily, while 19 percent used an application on a mobile device for daily messaging (ExactTarget 2012).

The use of smartphones has spread widely, with 53 percent of all Americans over 12 years old (approximately 139 million individuals) and

75 percent of those aged 18 to 34 owning one (Edison Research 2013). Moreover, tablet adoption is also growing, with about 20 percent of the adults in the United States owning tablets. (Forrester Research 2012a). Regarding mobile marketing and advertising, Forrester Research estimated that U.S. mobile ad spending on social network will reach \$4.5 billion by 2018. Forrester expects that the number of U.S. social media users accessing social networks via mobile will exceed 200 million by 2018 (Forrester Research 2013a).

Facebook had approximately 819 million mobile monthly active users by the middle of 2013, an increase of 51 percent year-over-year. The application Facebook for Every Phone has passed 100 million monthly active users in 2013. Facebook's 101 million U.S. daily mobile users make up a whopping 78 percent of its 128 million daily U.S. users (TechCrunch 2013). For Facebook, mobile advertising revenue represented approximately 41 percent of advertising revenue for the second quarter of 2013 (Facebook 2013). In 2013, eMarketer estimated that approximately 100 million Americans will access their Facebook account via mobile phone at least monthly. Nearly all mobile social network users will use Facebook via mobile. The overall mobile Facebook population will increase by more than 50 percent between this year and 2017, the end of eMarketer's forecast period (eMarketer 2013).

Mobile makes up more than 25 percent of YouTube's global watch time, with more than one billion views a day, while YouTube is available on hundreds of millions of devices (YouTube 2013). Just the same, Twitter has applications for iPhone, iPad, Android, BlackBerry, and Windows 7, while MySpace's new features work both on computers and mobile phones. Their new mobile app My Radio feature allows people to create and program their own radio stations, which can be streamed for free on an unlimited basis. This is extremely important, given the fact that one in three Americans over 12 years old listens to online radio on a weekly basis, listening to an average of 12 hours per week (Edison Research 2013). eMarketer estimates that in the United States, 28 million people will use Twitter on their mobile phones at least monthly this year, i.e., up 22 percent over 2012 (eMarketer 2013).

Besides mobile platforms used for marketing messages in social media, other tools that can be used include not only the classical SMS and

MMS, but also the much more modern location-based mobile marketing. Consumers can be targeted through mobile applications and games as well as through mobile search marketing. Some of the key benefits of the mobile channel for marketers are the following. One of its most important features is the potential for personal and personalized, interactive one-on-one consumer engagement. When targeting a consumer through the mobile platform, marketers benefit from much more personal information regarding the consumer; this enables them to adapt the marketing message to their target. From this point of view, mobile marketing is the most personal and targeted form of new marketing, and it represents a high opportunity for consumers to act fast on a marketing communication. Regarding viral marketing, the mobile platform represents a significant opportunity, given the ease and rapidity with which consumers can forward a message to other users.

Besides the increased use and time spent on smartphones and the personalization and targeting benefits, mobile marketing also presents a few bottom-line advantages for marketers. Mobile advertising has the potential to provide a better return on investment and higher click-through rates for mobile ads on social networks. In addition, ads created based on customers' profiles, such as relationships, likes, and tweets, are more engaging than standard ads (Forrester Research 2013a).

Marketers need to remember some key points related to the use of social media and mobile platforms that show the importance of this type of media in consumers' daily lives:

- Widespread use of top social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, at the global level
- Increasing number of social media users
- Opportunities for international targeting in foreign social media websites
- Increasing number of mobile media users
- Increasing social media access through mobile platforms
- Significant number of mobile marketing tools

Some of the key variables that can influence the viral potential for a marketing message can include innovativeness, consumers' willingness to

adopt and try new innovations, as well as their attitude toward advertising and mobile marketing. Just as with any other marketing message, the degree to which consumers perceive the message as relevant and nonintrusive will significantly affect the way they perceive a marketing message; in addition, the entertainment characteristic is important in mobile circumstances too. The key characteristics of viral messages are further discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

Viral Marketing Characteristics and Tools

Some of the key characteristics of messages with viral potential include innovative, creative ideas and unique ways to present a brand or a product to consumers. Modern marketing messages need to be exciting, funny, provocative, and even shocking in order to attract attention and make consumers share them. As examples of successful viral campaigns show, viral messages need to have a certain something that makes them different and controversial, which raises the level of communication to the consumers. Just as in the evolution of a biological virus, in the spreading and success of a marketing virus, it is important for the message to be able to penetrate consumers' minds and hearts, to make them like the ad and forward it.

The difference between successful viral marketing campaigns and the ones that do not *take off* is related to the message's ability to connect with consumers and persuade them to engage and interact with the marketing content, the brand, and ultimately the product or service (Kirby and Marsden 2006). There is an emotional or a material reward that increases consumer involvement and their decision to interact with brands as well as share their commercial messages in the social network. These characteristics are similar to the elements that encourage traditional word-of-mouth discussions among consumers. In the following paragraphs, we discuss the key points that increase the level of contagion of a marketing message and make it viral as well as the key tools available for marketers interested in creating and seeding viral messages.

Contagion

Previous research has shown that word-of-mouth is more efficient when consumers need to choose among similar products and brands because it

can help consumers make a decision and differentiate between goods and services based on other buyers' experiences. Word-of-mouth functions well for the credence of the message and particularly for experience goods and innovations, especially in the context where consumers find it difficult to try or sample the product and when new products are launched on the market (Derbaix and Vanhamme 2003; Larceneux 2007). Nevertheless, consumer-to-consumer communication is important for companies offering services, given the relative difficulty for customers to evaluate the quality of the offering without actually trying it. However, when evaluations from previous customers are available, the buying decision is easier for consumers.

The same key principles that apply to word-of-mouth can be used in the viral marketing context, given its potential benefits regarding the promotion of new products. In the Internet era, the viral possibility is an attractive opportunity, especially for companies who want to take advantage of a high-diffusion, low-cost promotion solution. A key characteristic of viral campaigns focuses on innovative, unique, and different approaches, content, and execution. Successful viral marketing messages need to be distinct from everything else on the market. With regard to being different, it is interesting to discuss the key characteristics that make viral messages pop out from the crowd and directly engage consumers. Research and practice have shown that marketing messages that spark strong emotion, including humor, sexual excitement, fear, sadness, or inspiration, are more likely to be forwarded. Extremely emotional and creative messages, including very funny jokes, very shocking images, or very sad stories are among those most forwarded by consumers (Horovitz 2009; Phelps et al. 2004). For marketing messages to be valuable for consumers, they must be entertaining, unique, and engaging.

Studies examined the effect of controversial sexual content on the communication effectiveness of advertising messages, including interest in the commercial, affect toward the product, and purchase intention. Consumers of both genders found a sexually controversial commercial more interesting than a noncontroversial ad (Severn et al. 1990). The success of controversial ads can be seen in the viral potential that these types of ads have during the SuperBowl. Some good examples are the GoDaddy ads, which are always controversial—including the ones showing Danica

Patrick taking a shower with another woman and strip teasing female cops—and are tools of viral marketing that encourage visits to uncensored versions on the company's website (Hosford 2010).

We consider that this link between controversy and contagion is the key characteristic of viral messages that gives them the viral potential, *contragion*. With regard to viral marketing, this element of contragion includes a few characteristics that are essential, message traits such as provocation, incongruity, and surprise. We intend to underline the fact that the most controversial messages, no matter what the source of the controversy (humor, incongruity, provocation through sexual images, shock, or surprise), are more prone to contagion and a high rate of forwarding by consumers.

Provocation and Shock

For marketing content to be passed along to other consumers, the message must be significantly distinct and innovative, and in particular, emotional enough to justify a forward action (Porter and Golan 2006). Viral marketing messages with provocative content include some particular reference or imagery related to sex, nudity, and violence, which motivates consumers to pass along content online. Provocation in advertising focuses on content that is expected to shock at least certain segments of the audience, because the content and messages are associated with values, norms, or taboos that are usually not challenged in advertising (Vezina and Paul 1997). In particular, in the online environment, marketing messages can be much more provocative as they are not regulated as strictly as television advertisements. Marketers can create violent and sexually charged promotional content with a high degree of provocative imagery.

One of the most successful marketing strategies when it comes to viral campaigns adopts the use of provocation with the intention to shock particular segments of the population. This works for viral campaigns if it creates an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand and stimulates the individual's imagination. Moreover, researchers have found that 73 percent of consumers would forward campaigns that are based on something more than just a great joke, including something particularly disgusting (Dobele et al. 2007).

Classic examples of provocative ads include the “United Colors of Benetton” campaign. It used provocative and shocking images that conveyed deep and controversial social messages. They portrayed racial, religious, and political issues. Their advertisements included photos of a young man dying of AIDS and the clothes of a soldier killed in Bosnia in order to underline the tragedy of poverty and war and their serious consequences. Other images focused on the fight against racism and showed graphic images portraying a young white girl as an angel with curly hair and blue eyes and an African American girl with *devilish* stylizations. For the same messages against racism, United Colors of Benetton portrayed interracial couples and a graphic image showing that human hearts are identical, no matter the color. Other examples include Esprit and its advertisement in favor of free choice (Vezina and Paul 1997). A key advantage of provocative marketing is its distinctiveness, which helps it stand out from the crowd and attract consumers’ attention. Marketers counting on provocation always need to be innovative and original to remain different.

Incongruity and Surprise

Incongruity or divergence in marketing messages, especially in relation to the use of humor, refers to a deliberate violation of rational expectations, making the funny appeal seem unexpected, improper, or inappropriate (Brown et al. 2010). Incongruity can refer either to consumers’ expectations or to the relevance of the information processed. It can be used in the execution elements of an advertisement, such as graphics and design, and in brand or informational elements, including text. Social psychology research has shown that consumers appreciate divergent, innovative, and creative ideas.

Incongruent ads are able to create a contrast effect against the other ads on the market, capturing consumer attention and interest. Divergent ads increase the consumer’s motivation to process an ad and make viewers curious and interested in the unusual format and content of this type of advertising (Smith and Yang 2004). The use of surprise in marketing messages adopts content that is unexpected, not anticipated, and touches consumers’ emotions. Surprise or unexpectedness is considered important in the context of viral marketing, especially because it appears to

transform into humor under appropriate circumstances (Brown et al. 2010). It is usually created by unexpected characteristics and uses of a product, brand, or marketing communication.

The responses to it are usually feelings of amazement and astonishment. Researchers found that surprise, as a generator of humor, is more effective when it includes a feeling of playfulness and warmth or other types of emotions such as joy or disgust (Cline et al. 2003; Dobele et al. 2007). Surprise or unexpectedness can transform into humor under specific circumstances. Coupled with other emotional reactions, including joy (positive surprise) or disgust (negative surprise), it can amplify them and create a halo effect that influences memory and subsequent affects (Lombardot 2007; Vanhamme 2000).

Researchers found that positive surprise, as an amplifier of subsequent effects, is an efficient means to generate positive reactions and word-of-mouth, while negative surprise has the potential for negative word-of-mouth. Moreover, positive surprises have been positively linked to consumer delight (Vanhamme 2000). Research has noted that the likelihood of inducing social sharing and viral effects is high for surprised consumers, because of the emotional amplification property of surprise, which leads to a higher intensity of affective reactions (Derbaix and Vanhamme 2003). Studies concluded that the emotion of surprise has a strong influence on referral behavior, an important aspect for the success of viral marketing. The intensity of surprise is important as studies have noted that the more surprised the consumer is, the more likely he will be to spread word-of-mouth and marketing messages (Derbaix and Vanhamme 2003).

The most successful are the messages that are totally different than consumers' expectations and are able to raise their curiosity and incite emotional responses. Consumers pay more attention to messages and content that are unexpected and take them by surprise and are more likely to share these distinct messages with their social group.

Commercial Content Viral Tools and Platforms

The Internet and, especially, the social media include a number of online tools and platforms where people share their perspectives, opinions, and experiences that can be used for viral marketing purposes. These tools include traditional web pages, business profiles on social media websites

such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as different types of communication tools promoted by social networking websites.

Business Web Pages

The traditional websites represent, for any business, not only a modern way to present the company, its products, and services, but also to include different promotional and interactive tools. An advertisement or video with viral objective can be placed and promoted on the company's webpage. To the commonly used traditional tools that apply to business websites, businesses can add more interactive ones such as blogs, newsletters, and consumer forums. These allow for companies to transmit updates, post news and information that have the potential to become viral, and encourage significant interaction with consumers with the possibility to reply to their comments.

Newsletters can be posted on the website, sent by e-mail, and shared across in social networks, which allow them to become viral and be shared among consumers. Community forums created by a company promote communication among consumers and feedback to the company as well as represent a platform to share viral messages and information. Businesses can also encourage consumers to register their profile on their webpage for different incentives, such as promotions and coupons, which allow marketers to have information about online users and create personalized communications. This is why an integration of traditional marketing communication platforms with new social media communications is recommended.

Social Media Communication

Social media profiles represent a more modern and interactive platform of communication than traditional websites. Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are now common elements in the promotion mix and customer loyalty strategies and are especially useful for small businesses. They are very user friendly and easy to use, allow for instant communication with consumers, and present opportunities for a variety of marketing tools. Moreover, businesses can keep track of subscribed

followers or friends of consumers, have access to more information about their profiles, and adapt the marketing messages to suit them.

Social media benefits viral campaigns through the fact that it encourages significant interaction between consumers and brands and contributes to the creation of relationships with consumers. Online social networks can increase the exposure time for a commercial message and repeat interactions with a brand's profile.

Besides creating profiles on the top social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and others, businesses have a variety of tools available to them to share information and connect with consumers. Social media profiles can be used to promote traditional communications, including the company's website and newsletters. Websites such as Facebook and Twitter allow for fast updates related to the company and its offers. Companies can share information about price promotions, coupons, sweepstakes, and even post advertising content such as photos and videos. As long as the marketing communications present some viral characteristics, including innovation, creativity, and contagion, they have a high potential to become viral as a result of the advantages of social media. Many modern viral campaigns have started with advertisements posted on YouTube and shared on Facebook or Twitter. Furthermore, social networking websites allow marketers access to information regarding the profile of their consumers and facilitate personalized marketing messages and communication with customers. The integration of the mobile platform in the social media strategy can only contribute to increased interaction with users and widespread communication.

The key advantage for businesses in having social media friends or followers comes from the fact that they can not only send adapted and personalized marketing content to the respective consumer, but they can also make it easy for the user to share the information. Moreover, with (or without) users' permission, businesses have the ability to post on consumers' social media profile different messages and communications. As long as this relationship is well managed and consumers do not feel an intrusion in their personal online space, dealing with social media users presents significant advantages in the launch and development of viral marketing campaigns.

Mobile Sites and Applications

The trend in the mobile market is for more and more users to access social media through mobile platforms. The number of U.S. social media users accessing social networking sites via mobile is expected to exceed 200 million by 2018. It is also estimated that nearly one-fourth of consumers will be mobile-only social media users; the rest will access social networking sites via both PC and mobile (Forrester Research 2013). Under these circumstances, social media applications are among the top apps that smartphone owners use.

On mobile platforms, businesses can not only optimize their pages and profiles for mobile use but can also create applications that consumers can use. For example, it is common for large retail businesses, such as Target and Costco, to create mobile applications that facilitate consumers' use of coupons. On mobile platforms, advertising is becoming a major player. Research has shown that the click-through rates for mobile ads on social networks is much higher than for desktop ads and provides a better return on investment for marketers. Advertisements targeted according to social signals, such as relationships, likes, and retweets, are more engaging than classic ads and are more popular on mobile platforms. Online advertising, including ad networks, ad exchanges, demand-side platforms, sell-side platforms and data management platforms, is expected to significantly evolve for mobile social networks over the next five years, while U.S. mobile ad spending on social networks will reach \$4.5 billion by 2018 (Forrester Research 2013).

In an environment with so many available tools and diffusion platforms, many companies choose to use a combination of online channels and content, such as promoting a message on the company's webpage, Facebook, and Twitter or using traditional content such as a press release or video and mobile applications. One example is represented by the successful and controversial "Scarecrow" campaign from Chipotle, where the company launched both a short video that became viral and a mobile application—a game—to promote their message of sustainable farming and agriculture.

Strictly speaking about marketing tools that apply only to the mobile environment, marketing content and information can be transmitted through traditional mobile communications such as SMS and modern

Table 4.1 Online viral marketing tools

	Commercial	User-generated
Business websites	Blogs, newsletters, advertisements, press releases, videos, games, contests, sweepstakes	Consumer forums, customer reviews; profile registrations, blogs
Social media	Business or brand profiles, price promotions, coupons, sweepstakes, advertising content, photos and videos, news	customer reviews, consumer comments, user endorsements and likes, reposting of brand messages, user-generated advertisements
Mobile platform	Advertising, games, brand applications, utility applications, SMS	Applications, social media posts, SMS

tools such as advertising in different mobile applications and creating a company or brand application. Mobile applications can have different content and purposes. The most common mobile applications used by companies are business or brand applications, usually including information regarding locations, product lines, price promotions, and weekly ads. Other applications that can be created include some type of utility for users such as a daily calories intake monitor coming from a weight-loss product manufacturer, a daily tracking of the eating and sleeping habits of a baby created by a baby-food manufacturer, or a cooking advice and recipes application from a grocery store. Nevertheless, mobile games created by businesses represent a great and entertaining way to involve consumers with the brand and create possibilities for interaction and a platform where brand messages can be presented.

Some of the most important marketing tools that can be used on different platforms to encourage the formation of viral messages can be seen in Table 4.1, including the user-generated content that is discussed more in detail in the following section.

User-Generated Content

The widespread use of the Internet, social media, and mobile platforms allow companies to benefit from more interaction with consumers and to get them actively involved in the diffusion and in the creation of marketing content. One tool similar to traditional webpages includes company

created wikis, websites that allow users to add, delete, and edit content. This increases consumer involvement and interaction with the brand and allows them to be directly involved in answers to frequently asked questions about each product and brand. On the same note, online forums and consumer communities allow users to network among themselves on different topics and contribute to information sharing, increasing the potential for viral campaigns.

Companies that encourage consumers to post reviews about their experience with the brand and the product, especially on external and neutral websites, benefit from positive effects on the image and evaluation of a brand or product. For example, 67 percent of consumers consider that user product reviews are the best source of truth, noting the impact of consumer-generated content in the evaluation and purchase of a brand (Adobe 2013). Likewise, research has shown that, when consumers make a purchasing decision, they take into consideration not only the rating of the reviews but also the number of reviews that are available for brands and retailers (Petrescu and Korgaonkar 2011).

Encouraging consumers to post brand communications in their social networks represents another way for marketers to stimulate viral campaigns. Many companies use Facebook and Twitter to post marketing communications about special offers, consumer contests, and sweepstakes, and encourage consumers to like the Facebook messages or retweet the Twitter message. Although commercially-generated promotions still have the most appeal, 28 percent of consumers prefer consumer- and user-generated content, and 27 percent of marketers agree (Adobe 2013).

At the same time, highly successful viral advertising campaigns are based on user-generated content. The Doritos SuperBowl campaigns are a classic example of using social media and user-generated advertisements to create viral campaigns. For the last couple of years, ever since 2006, Doritos launches on Facebook a competition for consumers to create the best and funniest advertisement for the brand. The best consumer-created commercials are then shown on television during the SuperBowl and receive millions of hits online, because of the viral sharing by consumers. The brand launched the “Crash the Super Bowl” campaign, a contest that invited consumers to create and upload their own Doritos ads. The winners—determined by online voting—would be aired during

the SuperBowl, and Doritos would offer prizes of \$25,000 each for finalists, and significant bonuses if an ad landed in the Top three on the USA Today Ad Meter (for example, \$1 million bonus for number one in the top). The competition brought them significant success on TV and online and quite a few winners of the USA Today Ad Meter such as “Dog Bribe” in 2012, “Pug” in 2011, and “Crystal Ball” in 2009. All these advertisements were created by users and received consumers’ votes before being placed on television during a show with a large audience. Some of the general characteristics of these very successful Doritos ads include humorous appeals as well as elements of surprise and incongruity.

These types of campaigns and advertisements receive even more attention and interest from the public, because of the direct involvement of consumers not only in their diffusion but also in their creation. As discussed in the following chapter, this type of advertisement presents the key appeals that encourage the birth of viral campaigns, including emotional and humorous content.

The key points related to viral marketing characteristics and tools focus on certain distinct elements of viral marketing:

- To stand out and be forwarded, viral marketing messages need to have contagion characteristics, including elements of controversy, provocation, shock, incongruity, and surprise.
- Besides traditional web tools used by businesses, viral marketing messages should be placed in different social media platforms to receive significant initial exposure.
- The mobile communication platform is continually evolving and marketers need to use new tools such as mobile applications.
- User-generated marketing messages and especially advertisements are new tools that lead to higher involvement from consumers.

CHAPTER 5

Viral Advertising

Porter and Golan defined viral advertising as “unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others” (Porter and Golan 2006, 29). Other authors considered that viral advertising includes creating contagious advertising messages transmitted from peer to peer to increase brand awareness (Kirby and Marsden 2006).

The Internet offers a higher potential for an advertisement to become viral as it has an exponentially growing diffusion rate because of consumer action. Companies might pay for their creation or they can be user-generated; however, companies do not pay for their distribution from consumer to consumer. Transmitting an ad online in different formats (video, audio, or print) through social media, social networks, e-mail, and other platforms is much faster and has a much wider reach. Viral advertising includes different forms such as the link of a video ad from YouTube transmitted to peers through e-mail or social media. Classical viral advertising examples are the “Whassup?” viral ad from Budweiser and the Trojan condoms’ 2004 “Sex Olympics,” downloaded more than 40 million times (Reid 2005). Other well-known and seen examples include advertisements for Levi’s, SmartWater featuring Jennifer Aniston, and the SuperBowl featuring Doritos.

Viral advertising relies on consumers transmitting the message to other consumers within their online social network. Viral advertising is controlled by consumers and is less under the control of advertisers. If viewers do not like the ad, it not only affects the attitude toward the ad or brand but also their intention to transmit the message. Consumers need to like the ad enough to purchase the product and to pass the message forward. Articles on this topic have shown that most viral ads have distinct

characteristics when compared to traditional advertising, such as a catchy message, controversy, provocative content, shock or surprise, entertainment, and higher engagement levels, usually associated with humorous appeals (Cruz and Fill 2008; Swanepoel et al. 2009; Wasserman 2009). For example, 73 percent of consumers say that advertisements should tell a unique story, not just try to sell, whereas 19 percent state that every brand needs a funny viral video (Adobe 2013).

Viral advertising is personal and even though it comes from an identified sponsor, usually companies do not pay for its seeding or distribution. Companies are involved in its distribution only during the initial placement and diffusion through online platforms or e-mail, before consumers take over the entire transmission process. Most of the classical viral ads circulating online are ads paid by the sponsor brand, launched either on the company webpage, social media profile, or on social media websites such as YouTube. Consumers receive the link or the ad content and pass it along through e-mail or posting it on a blog, webpage, and social media profile.

We define viral advertising as unpaid electronic (e-mail, web, and social media) distribution of business or user-generated advertisements from consumer to consumer, based on ad content likeability, entertainment, and controversial characteristics. Although viral advertising messages are still created and sponsored, in most cases, by companies, their viral characteristics contribute to the diffusion of the message at very low costs and with widespread propagation potential.

Emotions

Emotions are generally considered advantageous over logic even in traditional advertising, because they do not raise the viewers' natural defenses, require less processing effort from viewers, and are generally more interesting and easier to recall. Emotional ads focus on the emotions and feelings that individuals will experience on seeing the ads and by using or owning a product (Stewart et al. 2007). Advertising based on emotions has the capacity to lead to behavioral changes more immediately than those based on logic, information, and argument would (Tellis 2004). Researchers found that feelings influence consumers' attitude toward the

ad, especially when the advertisements are transformational, rather than simply informational (Edell and Burke 1987).

Research has shown that consumers rate emotional ads as more entertaining and interesting, which leads to an increased forward rate in the case of viral campaigns. Advertisements that create joy and feelings of goodness and happiness are more prone to be liked and forwarded to others since individuals are more willing to pass along engaging and entertaining content in an attempt to create good feelings and positive emotions (Chiu et al. 2007; Dobele et al. 2005). Feelings of joy are related to helpfulness and cooperation, which can positively influence the chances of a viral campaign to succeed (Dobele et al. 2007). Under these circumstances, consumers are more willing to forward ads with higher degrees of hedonic values and when the message includes something they think others will enjoy (Fattah 2000; Phelps et al. 2004). If consumers feel happier, more optimistic, and even nostalgic, after seeing an advertising message, they will be more likely to forward the ad because they want their social network members to experience the same good feelings.

Research has noted that ads containing few informative arguments and based more on emotional appeals tend to create more favorable attitudes toward the ad than advertising containing a lot of information. Consumers' attitude toward the ad may be improved by the use of humorous appeals and likeable content (Muehling and McCann 1993).

Unlike logical arguments, emotions require less effort from the viewer, increase attention to the ad, are easier to recall, and can lead more rapidly to a change in behavior, which is beneficial for viral advertising. Viral ads need to be emotional or funny enough to determine if consumers will send it to their social network and build an emotional connection between the campaign and the recipient (Porter and Golan 2006; Tsai 2009). Research has concluded that emotions work in viral advertising because of the phenomenon of social sharing of emotions from individuals to their social networks (Dobele et al. 2007). Besides funny and humorous ads, other types of appeals used by viral advertisers include sex, nudity, and violence. Advertisements containing naked pictures or jokes in addition to information are the most common in the viral world, as we discuss in the following text (Horovitz 2009; Porter and Golan 2006).

Some successful online viral advertisements, such as Jennifer Aniston's ads for SmartWater, even joke about viral ads and their key successful appeals: sex, humor, and emotional content such as children and puppies. SmartWater ran a very successful viral partnership in which they developed a few viral advertising videos that were successful and presented the key characteristics of viral campaigns. One of the most viewed ads, entitled in a parody manner "Jennifer Aniston sex tape," features the actress in different hypostases that underline what modern consumers want to see in a viral video: sexually charged images with Jennifer drinking water, babies dancing in a sexual manner, some very cute puppies, some crying and emotional guys, as well as a bit of violence when the artist slams an actor's crotch because it apparently works. Another video continues the viral strategy based on humor and sexual appeal, by running a video showing "stolen security camera footage," capitalizing on consumers' need for gossip and information about stars and confirming Aniston's *pregnancy* reported in all kinds of tabloid outlets. Nonetheless, the actress is *pregnant* with triplets and continues to drink SmartWater and make fun of the gossip in the tabloid media. Sexual appeal is the key player in another advertisement in which Jennifer *gets in bed* with SmartWater. Emotional appeals are key characteristics of some of the top viral commercials of 2013, including the Ram Trucks SuperBowl commercial "Farmer," which collected, besides its SuperBowl run, 16 million views on YouTube and 1.8 million shares, and the emotional and nostalgic ad from Budweiser, "The Clydesdales: Brotherhood," with 12 million YouTube views and 2.7 million shares (Nudd 2013).

The overall objectives of these advertisements focus on making consumers laugh, feel good, or feel strong sentiments of nostalgia and empathy to make consumers like the advertisement and forward it to their peers. In this process, marketers expect that consumers will like the brand better and will be more likely to buy the product because of the positive emotional outcomes that it incites. In creating feelings of joy and optimism, humor plays an important role.

Humorous Appeals

Humor usage in advertising is and has been present for a long time in different types of commercials and mediums (Alden et al. 1993;

Chattopadhyay and Basu 1990). Advertising research has shown that humor is one of the most widely used message techniques in advertising, covering approximately 25 percent of prime-time television advertising in the United States (Weinberger and Gulas 1992). Some of the most memorable ads on the American market were based on a humorous appeal, including the Budweiser's Whassup commercials and the Doritos ads. Some of the top viral commercials of 2013 included humorous appeals, such as Evian's ad featuring dancing babies and children, viewed by more than 64 million times on YouTube and shared more than 2 million times. Another example is Pepsi MAX & Jeff Gordon's video "Test Drive," viewed 39 million times and shared more than 2.5 million (Nudd 2013).

Marketing research and practice have underlined the fact that humor, in general, has a significant positive effect on attention and recall, with a high potential to increase processing and comprehension. It contributes to a positive appreciation and trust of the source, important in the viral context, where humorous ads are the most forwarded, owing to their capacity to spark strong emotions (Phelps et al. 2004). Other researchers have noted that humor positively impacts consumers' attitudes toward the source or the brand shown in the ad and reduces irritation experienced from the commercial (Gelb and Zinkhan 1985; Sternthal and Craig 1973). The positive effects of humor on advertising come from its capacity to improve mood, create joy and satisfaction, and transfer these feelings to the advertised brand (Cline et al. 2003).

The effects of humor are at their highest potential when the use of humor is perceived as appropriate for the ad and product under discussion and is related and integrated with the message of the ad (Scott et al. 1990; Weinberger and Gulas 1992). Humor is highly subjective; therefore, its effectiveness depends on the context and characteristics of the audience.

In relation to viral advertising, the success of the humorous appeal is extremely important because viral campaigns are successful only if the consumer finds a true appeal in the ad or provocative content worth forwarding to others or transmitting to the world. Many of the most successful viral ads of the recent years show that the use of humor positively affects viral campaigns. Porter and Golan even say that humor is

“the universal appeal for making content viral,” employed almost unanimously in viral ads (Porter and Golan 2006, 31). Humorous appeals are successful in viral circumstances because consumers are more willing to forward advertising that is engaging and entertaining, that creates a good feeling and positive emotions that justify passing it along to other users. Nevertheless, thanks to the diffusion platforms offered by the Internet, a humorous advertisement is likely to be transmitted similar to jokes e-mailed or posted on social network profiles (Bampo et al. 2008). The element of surprise can have a positive effect on the success of humor. The effects of humorous appeals have a greater impact when using surprise in combination with playfulness, warmth, and relatively easy humor resolution (Cline et al. 2003).

Individuals forwarding funny messages do this for two main reasons: first, to show what interesting information or ad they found and to brag about it, and second, make individuals around them feel as good as they felt when they saw the humorous ad. Therefore, the funnier consumers think an ad is, the more positive the attitude toward the ad and the higher the possibility of forwarding the ad in the social circle. Advertisements that consumers consider funny will have a higher chance to be liked and lead to a viral diffusion in the online environment.

Sexual Appeals

Researchers have noted that the use of sex appeal in advertising has been increasing in the United States during the last decades, especially focusing on graphic rather than verbal cues (LaTour and Henthorne 1994; Liu, Cheng, and Li 2009). Advertising appeals based on sexual content have been used for decades in advertising, and they have become quite common even in traditional advertising (Liu et al. 2009). On the Internet or on television it is much more facile to distribute advertising with sexual appeal than in print, because the regulations regarding the use of sexual content are less restrictive. Advertisements with sexual appeal are based on brand information using sexual content and nudity or focus on sexually attractive and suggestive images. It includes messages associated with sexual information such as brand information in advertising contexts (Reichert et al. 2001).

The use of sexual appeal in advertising is primarily targeted at attracting attention and generating interest. Studies show that a sexual ad will attract significant initial attention and will retain it for longer periods of time than other types of ads, while increasing consumer recall and recognition of an ad and brand (Liu et al. 2009; Shimp et al. 2007). Another key benefit of advertising based on sexual appeal is its increased potential for creating positive emotional responses, including excitement and arousal. This type of emotion and excitement can subsequently reflect in a positive attitude toward the ad and the advertised brand and higher persuasion power than other ads because they retain attention for a longer time (Lombardot 2007; Reichert et al. 2001).

Sexual appeals are important for the success of viral marketing, since viral advertisements need to be provocative and appeal to common human motivations to forward an advertisement. Sexual appeal and nudity are among the characteristics that motivate consumers to pass along content online, especially if they include the contragion element, meaning some controversial, provocative, or shocking characteristics, as also sexual appeal used in combination with humor (Porter and Golan 2006). Especially successful are advertisements where the use of sexual content is rather unexpected and elicits surprise, an emotional reaction that positively affects recall, recognition, and forwarding of an advertisement and brand (Lombardot 2007).

In online advertising, sexually charged ads attract attention and interest, essential characteristics when the online competition is high and diverse. Important for the viral potential of a campaign is the fact that consumers react more positively to sexually oriented ads, usually rating them as more entertaining, interesting, and original than nonsexual ads, resulting in favorable predispositions toward the ad (Severn et al. 1990). Some of the top viral advertisements in 2013 are ads based on sexual appeal, including H&M's commercial showing an underwear-wearing David Beckham, which gathered more than 10 million views and one million shares in 2013 (Nudd 2013).

The influence of sex appeal on behavioral intention is especially important in the context of viral advertising, where sexual content has the potential to increase forwarding intentions. One example includes the success of online ads deemed too controversial for television, but which

create huge audiences through online viral means such as the GoDaddy ads featuring Danica Patrick in sexual hypostases or many of the advertisements prohibited on TV, including Kylie Minogue for Agent Provocateur. While GoDaddy focuses on just teasing consumers and sending them for more to the company's website, Agent Provocateur created an ad so sexy that it was prohibited from being shown on television. The controversial 2001 Agent Provocateur advertisement called "Proof" features Kylie Minogue riding a red velvet mechanical bull in Agent Provocateur underwear. The commercial was specifically created for movie theaters, and despite being prohibited on television, it received the best cinema advertisement title in a public vote launched by cinema advertising sales house Digital Cinema Media (DCM). The spot was characterized as not only very sexy, but also very funny, a combination widely used in viral advertising (The Telegraph 2009).

Sexual appeal has the potential to positively affect attitude toward the ad, by creating positive emotions, as long as the ad appeal fits the product and advertisement type and is perceived appropriate by user. An ad featuring sexual content has the potential to increase intentions to forward the ad, improving its chances of becoming viral. Sexual content needs to be relevant, related to the ad and the brand and also to the context of the advertisement. The gratuitous use of sexual images in ads just because the marketer knows sex sells is going to be penalized by consumers, especially those of the feminine gender (Dahl et al. 2009).

An example in this sense is a recent advertisement from Innerware, an Australian lingerie chain, which has been banned by Australia's Advertising Standards Board. Consumer complaints considered it "degrading and demeaning to women" and showing "a level of sexuality and nudity which is not appropriate." The commercial focuses on a lingerie-dressed woman going to the counter at a tire shop and asking the stunned man working there: "Can you fit me?" Some of the complaints submitted to the Advertising Standards Board stated that "the ad was discriminatory toward women and in very poor taste. It was highly inappropriate and had nothing to do with lingerie." The Advertising Standards Board ruled that the commercial was not exploitative or degrading to women. However, they decided that Innerware's ad failed to "treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity" and therefore can no

longer be aired (Huffington Post 2013). This shows circumstances where it was not the use of sexual appeal but the degree of nudity and relevance for the product advertised that led to the decision to ban it. Nevertheless, the advertisement still gathered significant attention on YouTube in the order of thousands of views.

Other advertisements banned from television include a series of sexy ads from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Some of the advertisements include lingerie-clad models getting naughty with broccoli and asparagus and a pizza delivery guy assaulted by sexy ladies and who, eventually, “can’t deliver the sausage.” Although the organization tried to air them during the SuperBowl, they were denied for being too sexy for television (PETA 2013). The videos did collect hundreds of thousands of views on the organization’s website and on YouTube.

The use of sex appeal within an ad needs to be appropriate to the product type to be efficient and influence consumers’ intention to forward and to buy. Marketers also need to keep in mind that a sexually charged ad might influence the intention to forward the message because of its sexual content, but might not positively influence, at the same time, the attitude toward the ad or attitude toward the brand.

Negative Emotions and Social Messages

Among the provocative aspects that contribute to the creation of a viral advertising campaign, researchers note the potential for sex, nudity, and violence to motivate consumers to forward content online. This is especially used in the online environment because viral advertisements are not subject to regulation by the Federal Communication Commission, as it happens to television advertising. The use of violence in online advertising has been especially linked to the dominance of video game advertisements (Porter and Golan 2006).

Nonetheless, research has found that messages that elicit strong emotions, including fear and sadness, are more likely to be forwarded (Phelps 2004). Some marketers will tend to avoid using content that might create negative emotions. However, researchers have shown that, whereas positive content is more viral and negative emotion content is less viral, some negative emotions are positively associated with viral

potential. For example, anxiety and anger inducing content is likely to lead to increased viral potential in view of their high-arousal and activation potential. The same does not apply to feelings such as sadness, which do not induce arousal and motivations to act.

An example of a viral campaign using negative emotions, anxiety, and fear to send a social message is the campaign “Before and after drugs: The horrors of methamphetamine” from www.rehab.com. It focuses on warning consumers about the dangers and the physical consequences of using methamphetamine and was responsible for significant increases in organic search traffic to the promoter website. Viral content contributed to increased number of authoritative links and social engagement, important for Google rankings. Within a period of 6 months, the campaign results showed a 750 percent increase in site visits as a direct result of these viral campaigns. A significant boost occurred at the launch of the first viral campaign which looked at the before and after images of individuals addicted to methamphetamine (Libert and Tynski 2013). Very graphic and terrifying images that incited significant negative feelings had a significant impact on viewers and urged them to forward the message to their social circle.

Another campaign based on negative emotions to spread a social message was sponsored by AT&T and warned about the dangers of texting while driving. It included stories of real individuals whose lives have been negatively affected by texting and driving. Acclaimed director Werner Herzog presents these stories in the powerful and emotional “It can wait” documentary. Moreover, viewers were directed to learn about the dangers of texting while driving and take the pledge at <http://www.itcanwait.com> and find more information on AT&T’s website. After only a couple of months since its launch on YouTube in August 2013, the video had accumulated more than 2 million views and 2,000 comments. The campaign was featured on Facebook and on Twitter, using the #itcanwait hashtag and was present in mainstream media. A well-known successful campaign using negative emotions, specifically anxiety of a totally different nature than the methamphetamine campaign, is represented by BMW’s “The Hire” campaign. It included a series of short films posted online, which included car chases and other anxiety inducing content (Berger and Milkman 2012).

Another marketing campaign using negative emotions is Chipotle's "Scarecrow," an animated video, watched by millions of consumers on YouTube. It generated negative feelings, controversy, and debates, and motivated consumers to act after it showed the flawed farming and agricultural system used for the food supplies of major fast-food and restaurant chains. This advertisement reflects the potential for marketing content featuring social messages to raise consumer interest, create buzz, and generate enough hype to make the advertisement viral. The success of this type of marketing campaigns is especially successful when the message generates strong emotions by identifying a cause important to the viewers or a common enemy that the company and its consumer can fight together.

A very successful viral campaign including a social message is Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign. Its YouTube video named Dove's Real Beauty Sketches campaign went viral and reached nearly 30 million views in 10 days, and it became one of the top viral commercials of 2013. It added more than 15,000 YouTube subscribers to Dove's channel over the following two months, not to mention substantial increases in followers on Twitter and Facebook as well (Libert and Tynski 2013). Its YouTube clip accumulated more than 56 million views and 14,000 comments until 2013. The campaign was launched in 2004 based on the findings of a major global study, *The real truth about beauty: a global report*. Dove included real social messages and started a global conversation about the need for a wider definition of beauty after the study proved the hypothesis that the definition of beauty had become limiting and unattainable. Among others, the study concluded that only 2 percent of women around the world would describe themselves as beautiful. Its "Beauty Sketches" campaign presented sketches of real women with the message that women are too harshly critical of themselves and are much more beautiful than they think. Their message focuses on "a world where beauty is a source of confidence, not anxiety."

As with any other viral campaign, the advertisement's appeal and content, especially in a highly emotional context, needed to fit the profile of the brand and the target market and present relevance for the specific situation. A main characteristic of viral advertising refers to a relevant, organic content of the ad, adapted to the characteristics of the brand and its consumers.

As seen in this chapter, some of the most important characteristics of successful viral ads relate to inciting consumer interest, generating emotional responses, and motivating viewers to share the advertisement with their social circle. There are a few elements that need to be considered when deciding the type of appeals to be used in a viral advertising campaign:

- Emotional appeals do not raise the viewers' natural defenses and require less processing effort from viewers.
- Emotional advertisements are easier to recall and have the capacity to lead to behavioral changes more immediately than logic, information, and arguments.
- Humor has a significant positive effect on attention, recall, and advertising comprehension.
- Humor positively impacts consumers' attitude toward the brand and reduces irritation experienced from the commercial.
- Sexual appeals attract attention and generate interest.
- Messages that elicit strong emotions, including fear and sadness, are more likely to be forwarded.
- The success of advertisements using humorous or sexual appeals and based on emotions depends on the profile and preferences of target consumers.
- No matter the type of advertising appeal selected, it needs to be relevant and appropriate to the brand and context of the advertisement.

CHAPTER 6

Hybrid Marketing

For viral marketing, interactivity and consumer active involvement lead to a loss of control for marketers over the diffusion of the marketing message and content. Consumers define the type of content, information, and entertainment they need, what they are interested in forwarding, and the channels used for diffusion. From this point of view, once the message is launched, marketers can no longer control how fast the message spreads, its presence on different online platforms, and the reactions of the users. The initial seeding of the message can be controlled and can gain benefits from the Internet, including specific focus on targeted groups; however, once the message is released, companies have little control. Traditional media, such as television or print, can offer greater control for marketers regarding the media platform used for diffusion, the targeted group, reach, frequency, and impact. Because both traditional and online marketing campaigns have their advantages, many companies prefer to use a hybrid marketing strategy by utilizing traditional and online channels to promote the marketing message and make sure it reaches the right consumer targets.

Hybrid Campaigns

A significant number of businesses, especially those with financial resources, prefer to use a combination of traditional and online channels to help the diffusion rate of their campaigns and their viral potential. Companies usually place an advertisement in a traditional channel (TV, print, or radio) with the purpose of generating significant consumer interest and discussions that lead to action. The advertisement is then posted, usually in an expanded form, in an online format on the company's website or in social media, or both to allow for consumer views and viral diffusion.

Although traditional media offer greater control for marketers on the message content and distribution, interactive marketing can improve both the breadth and depth of brand awareness by using different online platforms and involving consumers. The Internet allows for specific targeting of potentially difficult-to-reach groups, increasing the brand awareness for key market segments, which prefer the online platform for information and communication (Keller 2009).

One of the most used combinations of traditional and online campaigns includes a mix of television and online platforms to distribute video advertisements. Whereas the purpose of television diffusion is to create buzz and make consumers talk about it, the online environment is used to provide further interaction possibilities, more information, and extended versions and variations of the advertisement. Nevertheless, traditional channels are used to place teaser ads, specifically designed to create ambiguity, raise curiosity, and question marks with the intention to increase consumers' motivation and to make them act by forwarding the message and actively looking for more information and content (Smith and Yang 2004).

A successful use of television and online channels to create viral marketing campaigns is by GoDaddy with its SuperBowl and online advertisements. Because of the controversial nature of the company's videos, usually featuring sexually charged content with beautiful stars such as NASCAR driver Danica Patrick, model Bar Refaeli, and fitness coach Jillian Michaels, GoDaddy relies on viral marketing and encourages visits to uncensored versions of the advertisements on its own website (Hosford 2010). Some of GoDaddy's ads have included Danica Patrick taking a shower with another woman, strip-teasing female cops, and a controversial kiss between Bar Refaeli and a geeky actor. Throughout the years, GoDaddy has constantly based its strategy on controversy, risky content, and teasing ads, which many times led to their ads being banned on TV. A key focus of a traditional advertising platform that GoDaddy counted on for years includes the SuperBowl advertising segments. This not only helped the company in recent years to reach an approximate audience of 100 million SuperBowl viewers but also created significant controversy that contributed to the development of online viral campaigns. GoDaddy even used sexually charged teasers and advertisements

during the SuperBowl featuring Danica Patrick, with messages urging viewers to visit the GoDaddy website to see other spots featuring Patrick. Nevertheless, millions of online views were brought by the ads launched during the SuperBowl and by advertisements that were not even featured during the sports event, being banned for their content.

Another example is the Doritos campaign that involves user-generated advertisements placed on television during the SuperBowl and also on the campaign's Facebook page and on YouTube. The campaign received significant television coverage during a show watched by more than 100 million consumers and has millions of views online for the winning advertisements featured on TV from their consumer competition and for those only shown online.

Other viral campaigns start exclusively online, with low costs, and high diffusion potential, and aim to have marketing content and messages that will generate a lot of consumer buzz and help the campaign receive coverage in traditional media. This usually happens with commercials that are controversial, humorous, and stand out from the crowd and draw the attention of the print and television media. Examples of commercials that become news, especially in the print media, include advertisements banned from television, either for sexualized content or for other controversial messages.

One of the benefits of this type of hybrid marketing campaigns is the fact that they can target different consumer segments, connecting both with traditional and online media publics. Moreover, the initial placement can persuade traditional media users to try the online media too, especially if the marketing message includes an efficient teaser. The use of a short, well-placed, and efficient advertising piece with a teasing purpose can bring a significant number of consumers to a much more extended and detailed marketing content placed online. Another advantage is related to cost reductions compared to using only the television media. The initial investment in a televised or printed ad is well repaid not only by the television viewing of the advertisement but also by its subsequent online viral development, if the advertisement has succeeded in generating consumer interest and action.

Besides the combination of media platforms used, hybrid marketing campaigns use a variety of tools. Traditional and online advertisements

are supported by other online and social media tools, including messages on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. Not only do companies post information on their own pages and social media profiles, but they also encourage direct action from consumers in sharing and talking about commercial messages either through social media sharing or blogging about the company. Marketers can encourage online action by using sweepstakes and discounts if consumers like the social media page for one specific marketing campaign, complementing the traditional advertising on TV, radio, or print and encouraging the forwarding of marketing messages.

Unbranded Campaigns

Some hybrid marketing campaigns use a combination of tools and platforms and favor a new type of advertising that is gaining interest from consumers and major companies. This new type of advertising includes unbranded campaigns, which have better success with consumers, given its aspects of authenticity, entertainment, and differentiation from traditional advertising. Consumers get involved in unbranded campaigns and help make them go viral because of the noncommercial character of videos and other marketing content, and thanks to creative, controversial, and authentic content that raises consumer interest and curiosity.

Brands like Nike, Gatorade, and Levi's have found success imitating the YouTube style of amateur filmmaking, especially by using videos that make consumers wonder whether the content is real or not (Morrissey 2008). Levi's "Back-flipping" campaign appeared to include amateur videos of people back-flipping in their Levi's Jeans and received millions of hits on YouTube. The video was, in fact, created by professionals from the San Francisco based advertising agency Cutwater. Despite this fact, its unbranded characteristics, its controversial content, and the buzz its created around its authenticity made it a very successful campaign for Levi's, even though it was actually a regular, paid advertisement. The "Guys Backflip into Jeans" video was launched on May 5, 2008, on YouTube, by a stealth username "unbuttonedfilms." Although, initially, the video did not have any brand message or information, consumers found out later that the clip was sponsored by Levi's. The original video alone had accumulated over 8 million views and 27,000 comments until 2013 besides

other reposts of the video that have hundreds of thousands of views. Nevertheless, consumers started making their home videos with attempts of jumping into Levi's jeans, which made the campaign even more successful and increased the number of videos related to Levi's on YouTube and in other social media outlets.

Another similar example was created by Ray-Ban in 2007, by launching the video "Sunglass Catch," showing a guy in different circumstances, including funny and crazy ones, catching a pair of sunglasses with his face. The same as in the Levi's case, the video was unbranded. It accumulated more than 5 million views until 2013 and continues to receive views, even though consumers found out that it is actually an advertisement sponsored by Ray-Ban.

Another unbranded campaign included videos posted on YouTube of a man claiming to be the world's fastest nudist, posing in various locations in New York City, wearing only tennis shoes, tube socks, and a fanny pack. The campaign went viral and even appeared on websites such as The Huffington Post, Gawker, and on CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360* show. The videos were actually a viral video campaign for Zappos, the online shoe and apparel store. In the end, Zappos saves the day when the nudist receives clothes from a Zappos team. The YouTube videos continue to receive viewers and have been seen so far hundreds of thousands of times.

When discussing viral marketing, the recommendation is for marketers to create content that consumers want to see and share and avoid branded commercials (Tsai 2009). It is important to raise consumer interest by activating their curiosity and desire to find out the information and story behind the video. Besides curiosity, entertainment and novelty are important characteristics that work very well with unbranded campaigns.

One of the most successful unbranded campaigns includes T-Mobile's flash mob viral campaigns in well-known locations around the globe that have been going on for years and with tens of millions of views online. The cellphone carrier has gotten a lot of attention with its first and biggest viral hit, The T-Mobile Dance, in London's Liverpool Street Station. It was uploaded in January 2009 and featured people dancing to a choreographed mash-up of pop songs. A group of 350 dancers surprised

commuters passing through the railway station by performing 3 minutes of synchronized dancing. The dance was captured on ten hidden television cameras, edited, and premiered during an entire ad break in *Celebrity Big Brother*. At the start of the campaign, the “T-Mobile Life is For Sharing” YouTube channel featured the 3 minute video, a shortened version, a teaser, footage from the rehearsal (done at night), and reactions from the public. To involve consumers and add interactivity, individuals are invited to create their own dance videos to share with others. The T-Mobile Dance campaign was developed at Saatchi & Saatchi, London. T-Mobile’s flashmob-style advert at London’s Liverpool Street station won the TV commercial of the year accolade at the British Television Advertising Awards. The dancing and sing-along flashmob campaign continued with videos filmed in Heathrow Airport and Trafalgar Square in London and then expanded to the international scene, including United States, France, Belgium, Singapore, and many other locations and involved consumers and even stars such as Pink. The big success of this campaign was because of several features including the novelty, creativity, and interest raising characteristic of the video. The most successful videos of the campaign were unbranded and did not include commercial messages or any brand information.

Flash mobs include circumstances when a group of people appears in one location unexpectedly and usually performs a dance or musical part; flash mobs have become common examples of viral campaigns on YouTube in recent years, starting around 2009. Because of their attention-drawing and entertainment characteristics, flash mobs have become successful creative elements to be used in viral campaigns, especially in unbranded videos that have a higher potential to entertain consumers, make them curious about the background of the video, and make them decide to forward the clips to their social network.

Post Versus Push Versus Pull: “Posh”

Viral ads fit in the context of a pulling marketing strategy, when the advertiser wants consumers to associate the good feeling experienced from the provocative content of the ad with the brand (Porter and Golan 2006; Shukla 2010). Previous research has concluded that viral advertising has

the highest impact when the ads are *commercial-free*, meaning they are focused on entertaining and engaging the customer, rather than presenting a call to action or a marketing message (Cruz and Fill 2008). When the ad is focused on generating product or brand awareness, not on transmitting traditional advertising messages and a list of factual information about the product, then higher effectiveness and increased viral potential are expected.

Unlike traditional push-marketing, viral marketing focuses on the personal experience of the brand and marketing message and is based on the power and control that consumers have gained with the spread of the Internet. One of the reasons why viral marketing campaigns are successful is their noninterruptive style, as they enable consumers to choose to interact with the brand and forward the marketing information. With consumers in control, viral marketing campaigns are ultimately driven and endorsed by consumers themselves (Kirby and Marsden 2006).

However, even though viral marketing campaigns do not necessarily have a commercial call for action, that does not mean they only count on consumers reacting on their own. Besides the advertising and other marketing characteristics that make them viral, marketers pay attention to the posting strategy, meaning the platform and context where they decide to release the message and promote it. Posting an advertisement on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and on the company's webpage contributes to the viral development of the ad. The placement decisions are important for the viral potential of a campaign, just as the media related decisions are important in traditional advertising, when marketers need to choose between television, radio, and print.

Besides the pull characteristics of viral marketing campaigns and the very important decisions about the initial posting of the marketing message, businesses use elements from the push-marketing toolbox. To be entered in a sweepstakes contest to win different prizes or to receive a discount, consumers must like the Facebook page of a marketing campaign or tweet specific marketing content established by the company. Even though these elements do not include calls for action and "buy this" type of messages, they do represent ways of pushing marketing campaigns meant to become viral. This is done especially in the initial development phase of the virus, when marketers need to diffuse the message to key

influencers and market mavens who are inclined to take over the forwarding of the message.

Under these circumstances, viral marketing campaigns use a combination of tools from different marketing strategies and decisions, including posting, push and pull-marketing, and a posh mix of platforms and promotion ideas, especially in the incipient phase of the marketing campaign. This term is especially applicable to viral campaigns, given the fact that they need to have posh enough characteristics to make them stand out, be noticed, and forwarded to other consumers.

These new types of marketing strategies, including hybrid and unbranded campaigns, represent novelties in the marketing field and are especially a result of the widespread development of the Internet and social media use. There are a few important notes that contribute to the success of these campaigns:

- Successful hybrid campaigns can take advantage of the low costs and high diffusion potential of the Internet and the benefits of traditional media in targeting a wide variety of consumers.
- Hybrid campaigns can either start in traditional media to tease and motivate consumers to visit the online content or can start as online campaigns that create consumer buzz and draw traditional media coverage.
- Unbranded campaigns do not push a marketing message to consumers; the campaigns benefit from more authenticity, entertainment, and differentiation from traditional advertising.
- Unbranded advertisements raise consumer interest and curiosity.
- Viral marketing, unlike traditional push-marketing, focuses on the personal experience of the brand.
- Viral marketing campaigns are ultimately driven and endorsed by consumers.

CHAPTER 7

Releasing the Virus

In medical terms, for the virus to reproduce and thereby establish infection, it must enter cells of the host organism and use those cells' materials. The replication success is based on the host's susceptibility and permissibility. An important phase in the survival of a virus includes finding new hosts (Dimmock et al. 2007). Similar to the development of medical viruses, for viral marketing campaigns, it is important to find the right target consumers for the initial phase in the release of the marketing content for consumers to not only like the message but help it become viral by managing its transmission to other users. Under these circumstances, the market mavens are extremely important, especially in the launch of a marketing campaign.

Market Mavens

Market mavens are marketplace influencers with a multitude of consumer characteristics such as early awareness of new products, shopping enjoyment, communication of information about products and services, search activities, use of numerous sources of market information, and a propensity for reading advertisements (Feick and Price 1987). They usually tend to show a greater bias toward uniqueness and like to be involved in and learn about new technologies and new ideas. Research suggests that the market mavens' inclination toward acquisition and transmission of information might come from their involvement with the marketplace. This category of consumers constantly asks and searches for new information, initiates communication, and shares knowledge with peers (Goodey and East 2008; Walsh et al. 2004).

Studies have shown that, although market mavens communicate with groups like opinion leaders and innovators, they are not identical, even though they belong to the same "reference person" groups. Market

mavens' expertise is thought to come from a high marketplace interest, their obligation and pleasure to share marketplace information and help others. Opinion leaders usually derive their expertise following a significant involvement with a specific good or class of goods. Market mavens play a more significant personal role than opinion leaders and innovators and have more marketing-mix information (Laughlin and MacDonald 2010).

Market mavens are considered important in the word-of-mouth context, because they are motivated to learn about products and brands and to spread this knowledge and marketplace information to other consumers. In addition, one of the key characteristics of market mavens is their possession of a wide variety of market information. Although there is no consensus about the specific demographic variables that distinguish market mavens from other consumers, their key characteristic is their interest and involvement with the marketplace.

In social networks, mavens have been found to provide the message to the necessary connectors who spread it within the network. Certain persons can be both mavens and connectors at the same time, highly influential in the transmission of ideas and behaviors (Gladwell 2000). Some researchers studied mavens in the context of word-of-mouth motivations. Studies have shown the importance of the moral obligation to collect useful information and transmit it to others and the significant role played by marketplace involvement. Other researchers have noted that mavens are influenced by three key motivations: the feeling of obligation to share information about products and services, feelings of gratification and satisfaction when communicating with others, as well as the desire to help other consumers (Feick and Price 1987; Goodey and East 2008; Kassarian 1981). Consumer behavior studies found that market mavens play an important role in the transmission of consumption information, given the fact that consumers prefer reference group opinions rather than commercial communications and that interpersonal communication has a higher influence potential (Walsh et al. 2004). This represents a cheaper and faster way to gain new customers, especially in a highly computerized world.

The fact that mavens are more likely to attend and have a more positive attitude toward advertising and are heavy consumers of media is

significant for the diffusion of viral marketing campaigns and messages. Their propensity to initiate discussions with other consumers and transmit information to others is very important in this study. Researchers found the existence of eMavens, significantly using the Internet for their consumption information activities, which constitute important target consumers, especially for the initial posting of the marketing messages that have the objective to become viral (Walsh et al. 2004).

For viral marketing, the role of consumers interested in receiving advertising information and inclined to pass along this information to others is critical. Without this type of consumer, it is impossible for marketing messages to become viral and be transmitted from user to user. Research on market mavens found three key emotions that motivates them to get involved in marketing communications: the feeling of obligation to share information, the feeling of satisfaction in communicating, and the desire to help other consumers (Goodey and East 2008; Walsh et al. 2004). All these motivations apply when discussing viral marketing and can influence not only the potential for a commercial message to be viewed by this category of consumers, but also the possibility for the market mavens to forward marketing content to other consumers, given their obligation and gratification related to information sharing.

Interpersonal Sources

Among the factors that influence consumers' attitude toward an advertisement, researchers have found significant social elements, such as source credibility and attitude toward the source of the message (Cruz and Fill 2008; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Source credibility refers to how trusted the communicator is perceived to be in the respective domain in discussion. According to marketing communications theory, the message source is an important element in any communication relation, together with message and receiver characteristics. Some researchers found that credible spokespersons enhance the persuasiveness of a message, given their potential to create more immediate attitude changes (Chiu et al. 2007).

Research related to word-of-mouth has noted the importance of information sources, especially interpersonal, in the diffusion of information,

marketplace choices, and even in purchasing decisions (Phelps et al. 2004). Researchers have written about the importance of sources of information selection, how and from where the information is obtained, to understand consumers' responses to diverse marketing and commercial communications.

Generally, message initiators that are personal and have higher credibility sources have been found to have a higher impact on consumers' responses and purchasing behavior. Research and practice have shown that, if a source is perceived as credible, the messages it transmits are more likely to be acted upon and considered by other consumers. In the modern viral marketing world, researchers recommend a careful balance between control and impartiality in marketing initiatives to achieve more credibility (Cruz and Fill 2008).

Personal sources of information are the most important for consumers, especially when discussing new or high-risk products or when consumers are susceptible to interpersonal influence. Researchers opine that personal sources highly influence product choice and the diffusion of information related to new products (Gilly et al. 1998). Usually, interpersonal sources have a greater influence on consumer behavior because they are perceived as having no personal intentions or nothing to gain from the consumption recommendations they make. This is the reason why messages coming from personally (or online) known persons or friends are perceived as more credible and receive more attention from consumers (Chiu et al. 2007; Phelps et al. 2004). Word-of-mouth and other personal communications are considered more credible than commercial communications because they come from *people like me*, with a higher trust potential than a business or marketer.

In viral studies, researchers found that when product or brand information comes via an e-mail from a person known and familiar to the consumer, the receiver is more likely to pass along this information and forward the e-mail to other consumers. Naturally, when the message, such as an e-mail, originates from an unknown source, and it is an unsolicited e-mail, consumers usually delete them or at least do not forward them. Researchers suggest that individuals are more willing to forward e-mails containing a marketing message or content that comes from an interpersonal source rather than a commercial source.

This is because of the fact that individuals tend to trust those who are similar to them more.

The better and closer the relationship between the message source and receiver, the more likely consumers are to evaluate the senders as credible and dependable, leading to a positive attitude toward the message. In addition, through viral efforts, user-to-user communication can increase brand knowledge and awareness of products and help consumption messages spread quickly and with high diffusion potential.

Given the importance of interpersonal sources in the successful evolution of viral marketing campaigns, in the first phase when the message is released, marketers need to pay attention to their target market and the platform used. Besides the importance of targeting consumers who have an influence and like to communicate with their social circle, marketers need to facilitate the transmission of the marketing message. One environment that can be used in this context is represented by social media, where consumers feel closer and in a social relationship with the members of their online social network, even if some of the online friends might not be individuals that they personally and directly had a chance to know and meet.

Stealth Viral Marketing

Stealth viral marketing includes the electronic communication and spread of marketing messages with the help of people paid to promote the message, brand, or product, without disclosing their financial relationship with the organization (Swanepoel et al. 2009). The key point here is that the paid promoters do not make public that they are paid to promote the marketing message. These individuals are usually significant influentials in the online environment, no matter if we are discussing about artists and celebrities, bloggers, or reviewers of brands and products. For the target to be reached, the stealth promoters usually have numerous followers or friends on social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter.

In the case of stealth viral marketing, the promoters' recommendations and information sharing are actually paid personal recommendations although consumers may not be aware of it. Whereas consumers know

clearly that celebrity endorsements used in traditional advertising are compensated, in the online social media environment, stealth marketing does not disclose any financial relationship. Stealth viral marketing campaigns usually start by using paid social media influencers who distribute the message initially and help it reach consumers; it then becomes an organic viral marketing campaign. After the initial message seeding phase, there is usually no need to continue involving paid distributors because the campaign is expected to become viral on its own.

Besides the use of paid influencers, which some consumers are beginning to recognize, there are other stealth tricks used by marketers to influence the success and evolution of a viral campaign. Paying users to post positive reviews or repost something and even artificially modifying the number of views, hits, and clicks in the overall traffic statistics on a website might prove helpful in influencing regular consumers to share something just because so many people viewed or liked it. In this manner, consumers impressions and opinions are manipulated by false markers that show how appreciated the video, message, or brand are.

Even regulations are starting to adapt and align to this type of new marketing trick. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has enacted new Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising related to numerous business communications to the public, including blogging and celebrity endorsements. Bloggers who write about products or brands and businesses that run celebrity endorsements are subjected to the new rules. Bloggers who received compensation for positively reviewing or promoting a product must disclose their financial relationship with the respective company. It is considered false advertisement if paid bloggers write positive reviews about a product and misrepresent features of the product. In this case, both the blogger and the sponsor of the false advertisement can be in legal trouble.

Regardless of whether there are legal implications or not, stealth viral marketing might represent a tempting option for marketers, especially with so many overnight reality show celebrities with numerous followers and willing to promote anything for financial compensation. However, thanks to the widespread access to the Internet, consumers have become more educated and informed consumption wise, as well as more skeptical about all kinds of recommendations, reviews, and endorsements. In this

case, stealth viral marketing campaigns can backfire and become negative campaigns run by consumers, a topic that is discussed in the last chapter. Marketers willing to use this type of marketing technique need to be prepared with follow-up activities and messages in case their stealth strategy is not successful and consumers react negatively to potential stealth manipulation attempts. There were numerous funny hypostases when celebrities endorsed and promoted a specific product in advertisements and on their social media profile and communications, only for media outlets to post photos and videos of them actually using a product from a competitor brand. With the widespread use of the Internet, consumers are much better informed and educated and make it more difficult for marketers to use traditional and stealth strategies.

Marketers need to take into consideration some important points related to the source of the message:

- Market mavens are marketplace influencers characterized by early awareness of new products, shopping enjoyment, and increased communication about brands and shopping experiences.
- Market mavens are motivated to learn about products and brands and spread their knowledge to other consumers.
- Market mavens are motivated by the feeling of obligation to share information, feelings of gratification when communicating with others, and the desire to help other consumers.
- Sources of information with higher credibility have a significant impact on consumers' responses and purchasing behavior.
- Marketing messages received from credible sources are more likely to be evaluated positively and forwarded to other consumers.
- Stealth viral marketing campaigns can backfire and become negative campaigns run by consumers.

CHAPTER 8

Results and Evaluation

As social networks develop and evolve, defining and measuring the return on investment of social media marketing will get more difficult and complicated. Moreover, traditional tools and strategies used in marketing do not apply or need to be adapted to the social media environment. The objectives of a viral marketing campaign differ from those of a traditional advertising campaign.

Monitoring and evaluating the results of a viral marketing campaign can use some of the traditional marketing elements; however, most of the monitoring tools and evaluation metrics are significantly different from those used so far in marketing. As a result, marketers need to develop new methods and metrics that help them formulate objectives and define and measure the success of a viral marketing campaign (Forrester Research 2013). Research has shown that it is critical to measure the value of word-of-mouth and customer lifetime value and to continue researching methods and tools that link additional metrics, such as customer word of mouth and referral behavior to marketing strategy and then to financial performance (Petersen et al. 2009).

Although there are many articles related to measuring social media effects, there is not a lot known about how to really measure social media return on investment. Nevertheless, a recent study of marketing leaders found that 80 percent do not use data-driven marketing and 43 percent do not use metrics to guide future marketing campaigns. More than two-thirds (69 percent) of those marketers say their top managers use gut feel to decide (Duboff and Wikerson 2010).

It is important for managers to formulate and use quantitative measures that can help them evaluate the success of a campaign and assess their social media return on investment. Marketers need to pay attention to their objectives and correlate them to the measures used because some campaigns might draw attention and create consumer buzz but might

not make consumers want to watch the viral advertisement again or even buy the product. One such case is represented by Volkswagen's funny advertisements in 2013. One of the company's advertisements featuring a woman whose utterly obnoxious laugh just keeps going on and on has been selected as 2013's funniest ad, according to Ace Metrix, a Mountain View, California research firm. However, representatives from Ace Metrix say that the ad is just a little better than average advertisement in the most critical category of all: effectiveness; this is because consumers considered the ad not only funny but also annoying. The consumer survey ranked the commercial as nine times funnier than an average commercial, but the ad's overall score for effectiveness, which factors in likability, watchability, and persuasiveness, barely ranks above the average categories (Horovitz 2013). Although its effectiveness score might have been considered low, objectives such as creating consumer buzz or recall and recognition were successfully accomplished in this case. This is why the objectives of a campaign and the indicators and measures used to evaluate it need to be in correlation.

Objectives

Viral marketing is about touching a vital nerve-point of consumers, to exponentially increase the diffusion potential and the impact of the marketing message. The key point of viral campaigns is to make consumers associate the good feeling experienced because of the ad with the sponsor (Porter and Golan 2006). There are examples from practice and from the estimated effect of viral ads on company sales. For instance, the now famous "blend everything" commercials from Blendtec have led to an estimated 800 percent increase in sales (Truong 2010). This represents a classical situation where viral marketing has had the most significant impact, in particular, for a relatively new product that lacked the wow factor, for which this type of viral ad can prove significantly favorable and show bottom-line effects immediately.

In addition, another classical viral advertising campaign, Old Spice's "Smell Like a Man, Man," has been a huge success in terms of reach; it has been viewed more than 46 million times on YouTube and received 50,000 comments in 3 years. Another Old Spice commercial on the same note,

“Questions,” received over 24 million views. Research and practitioners focused on whether it increased sales. The answer was a categorical yes, according to The Nielsen Co. and new data from SymphonyIRI Group. As noted by Nielsen, sales of Old Spice Body Wash featured in the viral campaign rose 11 percent over the preceding 12 months (O’Leary and Wasserman 2010).

Marketing studies and the evolution of viral marketing campaigns in practice show that the key point of viral ads is to create buzz, brand awareness, and contribute to the bottom-line numbers, leading to increased sales. Because consumers participating in the viral process like the advertisements so much that they forward them to other individuals, it is estimated that this is going to affect their purchase behavior and intentions, especially if and when they are on the market for the respective category of products.

Consumers willing to forward an advertisement to their contacts will be more likely to purchase the respective product or brand featured in the commercial. Given viral advertising’s objectives to entertain and elate consumers, to create brand awareness, and buzz, Internet users who like an ad so much that they decide to forward it are more inclined to buy the respective brand.

Viral marketing campaigns aim to generate a large number of peer-to-peer recommendations and a large diffusion evolution, which will lead to increased credibility of the message. Because of its exponential growth in the diffusion and high reach capacity, viral marketing messages can contribute to increased sales, reduce marketing costs related to media platforms, and reach consumer segments that are tech-savvy and prefer to use social media communication platforms (Dobeles et al. 2007). The use of viral marketing campaigns in the online environment and especially in social media allows users to share messages with their social group, significantly reduces customer acquisition costs, and increases the reach potential for any marketing message because of its multiplier effect and interactive characteristics (Shukla 2010). Viral advertising, with its contagious messages that get transmitted from peer to peer, has the potential to increase brand awareness, especially when the product is not a highly differentiable one compared to the competition. Although sales and cost reductions are traditional objectives for marketing campaigns, in an online

and social media environment, marketers should emphasize awareness, engagement, and word-of-mouth objectives (Hoffman and Fodor 2010).

Research and practitioner articles have discussed the economic benefits of viral advertising to build widespread brand awareness and to help generate consumer interest, product trials, and finally, sales. Viral advertising has been praised for its potential to increase consumer communication between persons who know or do not know each other and increase message credibility, leading to higher sales and reduced marketing costs (Keller 2009). It is especially useful when the product itself does not have a wow factor able to generate consumer discussions and buzz and extremely beneficial for new products as it lowers the cost of promotion and boosts the adoption speed. Besides an increased level of brand awareness, viral marketing campaigns can contribute to increasing consumer-driven interest in new marketing communications activity, being used as teasing materials before the launch of a traditional and online marketing campaign. Other objectives refer to creating buzz about new products and brands, reinforcing existing branding messages, and increasing response and recommendation rates (Kirby 2006).

Like positive word-of-mouth, viral marketing has the potential to motivate and lead consumers to product trial and acquisition (Ferguson 2008). Viral marketing campaigns can replicate brand communications through traditional word-of-mouth in an even more efficient manner, can build trust and reputation, and become a source of competitive advantage in relation to other brands on the market (Datta et al. 2005). As in the case of word-of-mouth, viral marketing can have as objectives a positive effect on product diffusion and purchase decisions, increasing the liking of the brand and the probability of purchase.

There are many concrete objectives that marketers can formulate for a viral marketing campaign in terms of the SMART criteria (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound). Some of the most specific objectives can refer to the number of views of the posted advertisement and other related events that can contribute to the development of a viral situation such as the number of likes and comments posted by consumers. The key objective is for a large number of people to view an advertisement or a marketing message. Consequently, besides the number of views targeted, marketers focus on the sharing process and on how many times the marketing content is shared.

There are many sharing objectives that marketers might formulate. Marketers can focus on the number of active hosts who make direct contact with uninfected individuals. From this point of view, marketers can encourage active users to share the marketing message with other users through different tools and rewards. Conversion rate is important under these circumstances, especially when using marketing messages that include a call-to-action. Under these circumstances, a practical way to organize the objectives expected as a result of a viral marketing campaign is by grouping them into cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, and financial categories, as seen in Table 8.1.

Some of the top cognitive objectives are related to increasing consumer awareness about the brand through viral marketing campaigns.

Table 8.1 *Viral marketing objectives and metrics*

Category	Objectives	Metrics
Cognitive	<i>Increase brand awareness</i>	Number of content views or visits
	Increase consumer-driven interest in new marketing communications	Number of reviews
	Create buzz about new products and brands	Number of members
	Reinforce existing advertising and branding messages	Number of likes
	Increase brand differentiation	Number of shares
		Product knowledge (surveys)
Attitudinal	<i>Increase positive attitude toward the brand</i>	Number of likes
	Increase positive attitude toward company's brand communication	Attitude toward the brand (surveys)
		Number of shares
		Number of reviews
		Length of reviews
		Reviews score
		Attitude toward the campaign (surveys)
Behavioral	<i>Increase brand engagement</i>	Amount of user-generated content
	Increase word-of-mouth	Average length of time on site
	Increase response	Number of comments

(Continued)

Table 8.1 *Viral marketing objectives and metrics (Continued)*

Category	Objectives	Metrics
Behavioral	Increase product recommendation rates	Amount of replies
	Increase product trial and acquisition	Average length of time on landing page
		Number of followers/users/friends
		Number of reviews
		Length of reviews
		Reviews score
		Number of likes
		Number of reposts on social media profile
		Number of embeddings
		Number of incoming links
		Number of responses to invites
		Additional information requests
		Test-drives
		Sample requests
		Conversion rate
	K-factor	
Financial	Increase sales	Dollar amount increase of sales
	Increase product trial	Quantity increase of sales
	Reduce marketing costs	Reduction in marketing costs
		Reduction in customer acquisition costs

By facilitating consumers' access to marketing information about the brand, they will come to know more about the company and its products, which can influence their attitudes and behavior and help in the viral development of a campaign by transmitting the information they learned to others. By knowing more about the brand, consumers can maintain closer contact and interact more with the brand. Besides increasing consumer interest in the brand, viral marketing campaigns can reinforce existing marketing and branding messages by reminding consumers about older marketing messages and adding more information to them.

The cognitive objectives influence attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of viral campaigns. From an attitudinal point of view, viral marketing has the capacity to improve consumers' attitude toward the brand and the marketing messages communicated by the company. This is important considering the impact that attitudes have on the formation of behaviors and on users' intentions to forward the marketing communication and help the campaign become viral. Positive attitudes about a brand can make consumers more likely to generate personal communications and buzz about it, helping the viral marketing strategy in practice.

From a behavioral point of view, some of the key objectives of a viral marketing campaign refer to increasing consumers' brand engagement. Marketers expect consumers to become more engaged with the brand, spread buzz, and communicate about it to their peers. Some of the outcomes of a viral marketing campaign refer to significant consumer response to the marketing content and even some call-to-action messages that the communication includes. Besides behavioral objectives related to increased buzz and word-of-mouth, marketers have come to expect more traditional objectives to be accomplished, especially those contributing to the bottom line. In this category can be included behavioral objectives related to consumers wanting to try the product, purchase it and, subsequently, recommend it to other consumers.

Some of these behavioral variables contribute to improving the bottom-line outcomes and the financial objectives of the marketing department and the company. As with any marketing strategy, the key objectives of a viral campaign focus on financial results, mainly increased sales. Besides higher sales, viral marketing has other financial benefits related to a reduction in marketing costs and expenses. Viral marketing can be done with less financial resources because of the use of the Internet and the diffusion process performed by consumers; this can help avoid high costs in television or print placement, marketing content, and in particular, advertising.

No matter what the objectives formulated by marketers are and what they want to achieve through viral marketing campaigns, the set objectives need to be followed by the formulation of evaluation metrics. The measures should be able to monitor and evaluate the success of the campaign and signal potential changes that should be made to the strategy.

Monitoring and Evaluation Metrics

One of the main issues related to marketing campaigns using modern techniques, tools, and platforms is related to the evaluation of results. Any viral marketing campaign needs to be specific and measurable, for business owners, marketing specialists, and other stakeholders to determine whether it is effective. This applies especially in the context of viral marketing, where the start of the campaign is difficult and essential and can lead to either a grand success or a significant failure. Viral campaigns need to be managed by experienced individuals for the company to be able to formulate clear objectives and to evaluate whether they have been attained. However, measuring the return-on-investment for a viral marketing campaign or for any type of online social media campaign, as a matter of fact, is not an easy task. This cannot be done through traditional metrics, given not only the difference in campaign objectives but also the specifics of a social media viral marketing campaign.

Researchers have noted that a new approach to measurement is needed and marketers should begin by considering consumer motivations to use social media. Businesses should then measure the social media investments that customers make when they engage with brands and marketing communications. This type of evaluation approach helps managers formulate integrated marketing campaigns closely tied to online consumer behavior and allows for better decisions about the tools used in achieving the objectives formulated. Under these circumstances, viral marketing campaigns should focus not only on return-on-investment measures that underline short-term benefits for the brand but also on long-term results and benefits (Hoffman and Fodor 2010).

Marketing research articles have underlined the importance of incorporating in the evaluation of viral advertising both measures of awareness and reach and behavioral responses such as conversion rate, preference, and sales creation or increases (Bampo 2008; Cruz and Fill 2008). Research has shown that returns from online viral marketing investments should be measured in dollars and in customer behavior. Besides obvious measures such as the number of views, number of shares, and the time spent with marketing the message, measurement can refer to blog comments and the number of Facebook updates and Twitter pages about the

brand. These types of measures can subsequently be used to measure key marketing outcomes such as changes in brand awareness levels or word-of-mouth increases over time (Hoffman and Fodor 2010). Measures such as the number of views and shares are in the category of awareness and reach measures; both are considered important factors in measuring the effectiveness of a viral marketing campaign. However, measures referring to brand equity, brand preference, and eventual sales are also important. One of the viral marketing campaigns' benefits includes their capacity to provide accountability when tracked, helping in the measuring process, and providing quantitative information about the success of the marketing message. Viral campaigns are constantly in an evolutionary and dynamic process and can provide a return on investment even over time. There are examples of campaigns, such as Mazda's first online viral marketing campaign in the United Kingdom, released in 2002, which is still generating brand awareness and driving significant traffic to their website (Kirby 2006).

Besides these potential measures, a formula developed for viral marketing that draws elements from the field of epidemiology measures the growth rate of websites or marketing campaigns. The so-called K-factor uses the number of invites sent by each consumer and the percent conversion of each invite to measure growth rate. The formula states that $K=i*c$, where i is the number of invites sent by each consumer and c is the percent conversion of each invite. In the field of epidemiology, a virus having a K-factor of 1 is in a *steady* state of neither growth nor decline, whereas a K-factor greater than 1 indicates exponential growth and a K-factor less than 1 indicates exponential decline. The K-factor is itself the product of the rates of distribution and infection for a viral campaign. In this case, distribution measures, on average, the number of people a host will make contact while still under the influence of a viral marketing campaign and infection measures, how likely a person is, on average, to become infected after receiving the marketing message from another user (Radoff 2010).

To clarify and organize the information related to potential measures of viral campaigns, we include the key measurement possibilities in relation to the objectives formulated for the viral campaign in Table 8.1. In this sense, some of the key cognitive outcomes of viral marketing activities can include measures such as the number of views, clicks, and hits

for specific content, as well as the number of shares in social media, such as likes on Facebook or retweets on Twitter, which demonstrate that consumers processed the information received through the marketing message. Measures such as the number of reviews for a product or the number of members for a campaign webpage quantify the number of individuals who have acknowledged the information provided by marketers. Besides statistics that are related to online traffic, surveys can assess the degree of product or brand knowledge, though this type of measurement is more complicated and requires more resources.

Related to consumers' attitudes toward a brand or even toward the marketing communication, different online and social media statistics, including the number of likes and shares within a social network, can be used. The number of reviews for a certain brand or product and the quality assessed by users are indicators of attitudes. Classical measures of consumer attitude toward the brand can be gathered through surveys of consumers.

Behavioral measures are very important because changes in consumers' behavior and buying decisions are what marketers hope to see through viral campaigns. There are numerous indicators that can be used in this context as a function of marketers' objectives. Some of them include the most known online and social media statistics such as number and quality of shares, views, product reviews, and comments. Consumers' brand engagement can be measured through the K-factor, the number of followers, friends, registered users, and time spent on the website. Indicators that are more bottom-line oriented focus on consumers' actions after acknowledging the marketing content, including the number of requests for information, samples, or test-drives. Nevertheless, responses to actual call-to-action messages are important, including the conversion rate.

Consumers' behavior is expected to lead to contributions to the bottom line of the company, meaning increase in sales, both in quantity and financial amount. However, when quantifying changes in sales, managers need to consider other factors that could potentially affect sales besides the viral marketing activities. Besides positive effects on sales, the use of viral marketing is expected to bring significant reductions in marketing costs and expenses. The key points to remember when formulating viral marketing campaigns, as with traditional ones, is to formulate objectives

to be accomplished and measures and indicators to be used to monitor and evaluate the success of the campaign. The online and social media campaigns are less under the control of marketers and depend more on consumers' reactions and actions. This is one of the reasons why companies need to be able to monitor the evolution of a viral campaign and intervene, if needed. Nevertheless, there are examples of viral marketing content and messages that took a negative turn and did not resonate with consumers; and this is additional motivation to constantly evaluate the results of a marketing strategy and reformulate aspects that do not satisfy consumers.

For an efficient campaign and high quality evaluation of results, there are some important points to remember when formulating objectives and measures for viral marketing campaigns:

- Marketers should formulate and use quantitative measures that can help them evaluate the success of a campaign and assess their social media return on investment.
- Practitioners should pay attention to the campaign's objectives and correlate them to the evaluation measures used.
- The economic benefits of viral advertising come from building widespread brand awareness and from higher consumer interest, product trials, and sales.
- The objectives of a viral marketing campaign can be organized by grouping them into cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, and financial categories.
- A new approach to the measurement of results takes into consideration consumers' motivations to use social media.
- Viral marketing campaigns should focus both on return-on-investment measures and short-term benefits for the brand and on long-term results and benefits.
- The evaluation of viral advertising results should include measures of awareness and reach and focus on behavioral responses such as conversion rate, preference, and sales creation or increases.

CHAPTER 9

Negative Viral Campaigns

Researchers and marketing practitioners have noted that approximately 25 percent of consumer comments are critical or negative, showing that word-of-mouth can be both positive and negative and can bring not only benefits but also disadvantages (Plummer et al. 2007). Even though positive word-of-mouth has a significant positive impact on consumer decision making and in their purchasing decisions, research has shown that negative word-of-mouth can be even more influential and have a higher impact on consumer attitude and behavior. Negative consumer communication can stand out and be more impactful because of the fact that dissatisfied customers tend to be more aggressive in their communication and tell more people about their experience than those who are satisfied with their purchases. Consumers who take into consideration brand and product information from other consumers could be more inclined to pay increased attention to negative reviews and comments rather than just positive ones (Breazeale 2009).

Previous research on negative word-of-mouth has shown that unfavorable information about products and brands tends to carry greater weight with prospective buyers than favorable information and can even have a negative impact on sales. Some financial studies even found a significant relationship between negative word-of-mouth and consumer complaints and the evolution of stock returns. Viral marketing plays a significant role in negative consumer communications in relation to a brand, product, company, or even advertisement. On the one hand, because of user-generated communication and the benefits of the Internet in the diffusion of information, consumers can have a significant impact by creating negative viral campaigns. They can act in *viral revenge* when companies disappoint them and do not act according to standards (Perkins 2009). On the other hand, even positive viral marketing campaigns created by companies can quickly take an opposite direction and

become negative campaigns if consumers do not like them and intervene with user-generated negative content.

In the following paragraphs, we discuss key sources of negative viral campaigns and examples of campaigns that generated significant negative word-of-mouth about certain brands and companies. Another topic that managers need to take into consideration is the possibility of using a negative viral campaign to the advantage of the brand by transforming it into an opportunity to distribute positive information and messages to consumers.

Negative Content Sources and Platforms

Although many social media websites are trying to avoid offering consumers the possibility of getting into negative feedback wars, such as Facebook offering only the like and not the dislike button, consumers still have at their disposal many tools to offer negative feedback regarding specific marketing communications and messages. Facebook users can show their negative attitude toward specific content by hiding it from their news feed and even taking more drastic measures for a specific Facebook profile such as hiding all posts, reporting as spam, and marking unlike on the page. Practice has usually shown that this type of negative feedback usually increases as more companies place paid advertising or marketing messages that consumers consider too disruptive and intrusive. Here is where viral marketing campaigns should intervene, by making consumers like the advertisement and forward it themselves, instead of using paid social media ads.

Other social media websites, such as YouTube and StumbleUpon, offer, besides sharing opportunities, the possibility to like or dislike the content (thumbs up or down) and even to report the video for different reasons, including sexual, violent, or repulsive content, harmful acts, child abuse, spam, or infringement of human rights. This is especially important in the initial phase of a viral marketing campaign, when consumers make the decision whether or not to forward the marketing content. However, besides consumers' involvement or lack of involvement in the distribution and the viral development of a marketing campaign, with today's access to technology and the Internet, unhappy and dissatisfied consumers can

create their own viral campaigns to complain about poor treatment from certain businesses.

One thing to remember is that a negative message can also go viral. Unfortunately, you are not going to be able to please everyone. If you do enough business, eventually you are going to have someone who is unhappy with you and your business. It only takes one customer who is dissatisfied to put a shadow of doubt in your customer's minds about whether they should do business with you or not. Once that doubt is there, it is hard to remove it. If people are not happy with the service they received, they are more likely to tell people about it than if they are happy customers.

As unhappy customers start spreading negative messages about a brand, the word-of-mouth will start to circulate, and in the online environment, there is not a lot that marketers can do to stop it. The more a message spreads in the online environment, the higher its potential for even more diffusion and the more negative its effect on the brands' image. Moreover, businesses cannot stop the message because of the speed of circulation of the message and its sharing potential; any attempt to stop the message would only receive even more criticism. Nevertheless, while not intervening directly in the distribution of the viral message, businesses should actively start a damage control campaign to deal with the negative consequences.

An example of a social media post that was the result of a negative consumer experience is a promoted tweet paid by a British Airways consumer. Upset with how British Airways was handling the issue of his father's lost luggage, businessman Hasan Syed decided to complain about it. The promoted tweet bought by Mr. Syed reads: "Don't fly @BritishAirways. Their customer service is horrendous." He paid for it from his own money and targeted the New York and U.K. markets. British Airways' response came after 4 hours and stated: "Sorry for the delay in responding, our twitter feed is open 09:00 to 17:00 GMT. Please DM [direct message] your baggage ref and we'll look into this" (Wakefield 2013).

One of the most famous negative viral marketing campaigns created by dissatisfied consumers is the "United Breaks Guitars" video created by Canadian musician Dave Carroll and his band, Sons of Maxwell. The campaign started as a complaint song as a consequence of having his

guitar broken during a trip on United Airlines in 2008 and was especially motivated by the subsequent negative treatment from the airline. The video and the accompanying song became an immediate sensation on YouTube and iTunes when they were launched in July 2009 and generated an entire saga afterwards.

Basically, the origin of the campaign was musician Dave Carroll's bad experience when his \$3500 Taylor guitar was broken while it was in United Airlines' custody, after he alleged that he heard a fellow passenger exclaim that baggage handlers on the tarmac at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport were throwing guitars during a layover on his flight. Carroll filed a claim with United Airlines but was denied compensation and further participated in unsuccessful negotiations with the airline for nine months over compensation. After all this time, the United Breaks Guitars song chronicled his experiences and states that "I should have flown with someone else or gone by car cause United breaks guitars." The video gathered 150,000 views during the first day and reached more than 13 million views by 2013. Since then, two more videos were released, with the final lines stating that "They say that you're changing and I hope you do, Cause if you don't then who would fly with you?"

Besides the success of the campaign on YouTube and iTunes, it benefited from significant success in the media, who immediately noticed it and ran the message. Moreover, in 2009, Time magazine named United Breaks Guitars among the videos on its list of the Top 10 Viral Videos of 2009. In 2012, Carroll and his campaign were featured in the CNBC documentary *Customer (Dis)Service* and he published a book, *United Breaks Guitars: The Power of One Voice in the Age of Social Media*. Besides becoming an accomplished artist, Carroll became a favorite speaker in conferences dealing with customer service.

After the story became public and received so much attention from consumers and the international media, it became a strong negative point for United's public image and brand. Although the company tried different strategies to turn the negative situation, they were not very successful in coming up with with strategic excuses and reparations or in shaking off the image of guitars being thrown carelessly on the tarmac promoted by the United Breaks Guitars videos. United mentioned changes in their customer service policy and even their intention to use

the video for internal training, and offered a delayed compensation in the form of a donation.

Other even more recent examples of negative viral campaigns include videos with FedEx or UPS delivery persons filmed by dissatisfied and victimized consumers while throwing packages, including fragile content such as computers, over fences and on porches. The “FedEx guy throwing my computer monitor” 21-second YouTube video shows a FedEx driver delivering a computer monitor by throwing it over a fence. The video has received over 9 million views and more than 25 thousand comments on YouTube within one year. Although FedEx posted its response in a video format on YouTube, its reply had much fewer views than the initial negative viral video. Another similar video that was even featured on CNN recently shows a postman driving over customers’ lawns and throwing packages from a distance on their porches. Gathering millions of views and even national media coverage, these videos posted on YouTube represent a new form of customer complaint and have increased the potential of becoming viral and impacting the image of the company. Thanks to the widespread use of the Internet, customer complaints have much more potential of becoming known, becoming public, and being forwarded by other consumers in the online environment.

Not even major companies, especially well-known companies, escape consumers’ angry responses in the form of negative viral videos. Microsoft experienced the popularity of negative viral content for its main product, Windows, when in 2007 an angry user posted the “Vista install in 2 minutes” video on YouTube concerning his unpleasant experiences with installing Windows Vista. The video received more than 4 million views by 2013.

The hospitality and fast-food industries are not exempt from this kind of negative viral videos. A disgusting video taken by Taco Bell employees showed one of them licking taco shells that were eventually served to customers. The video received millions of hits on YouTube and made the rounds in traditional media, too, putting a significant blemish on the company’s sometimes struggling image. Domino’s Pizza suffered a setback because of two employees who decided to film and post online a prank video in which they can be seen doing disgusting things with the food about to be cooked or delivered. After the story gained speed

and coverage, the two employees, who stated that it was all a prank and the food was not actually delivered, were fired by Domino's and were arrested, facing felony charges. In just a couple of hours, the perception of its quality among consumers went from positive to negative. The company tried to do damage control through all means possible, including placing videos on YouTube with its chief executive officer and creating a Twitter account (Clifford 2009).

The all-you-can-eat food chain Golden Corral experienced a few setbacks with negative viral videos that enraged consumers posted online. An employee of the restaurant posted in 2013 a video on YouTube showing racks of cooked food being stored outside near garbage dumpsters in anticipation of an inspection. The video became extremely popular on YouTube and other social media websites and received almost 4 million views in 2013 and 10,000 comments.

Other potential platforms and formats that consumers can use to voice their complaints and concerns with viral potential include messages in social media, including frequently used websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Already, traditional online tools, such as blogs, especially from users influential in the online environment, that enjoy significant exposure with other consumers, can represent significant ways of complaining about certain brands or purchasing experiences. Other sources of negative consumer messages include review websites and comments posted to different marketing communications, including on the company's webpage or social media profile. Viral marketing campaigns initiated by businesses can take a turn and become negative campaigns in the hands of consumers.

Positive Becoming Negative

Although there are many advantages in using viral marketing for promotional purposes, especially in view of its high diffusion potential and low costs, there are disadvantages and potential risks stemming from an increased consumer control over the message diffusion, the potential for widespread reach, and, in particular, from the inability of marketers to predict with certainty the evolution of a marketing campaign or to control it too much once it is launched. One of the disadvantages of

viral marketing is related to the increased competition in this market and difficulty in establishing specifically what consumers will appreciate and forward, as well as what they will be able to notice in an agglomeration of videos and marketing messages posted in the social media. Because of this, it might be difficult for individuals to determine to which messages they should pay attention. Being categorized as a spam marketer is a negative aspect for any business and is more likely to annoy consumers and make them delete or ignore it on future occasions.

Besides the inherent risk of not having a successful campaign and not being able to draw consumer attention and action, there is another threat that viral marketing campaigns face. Quite often, instead of creating a positive environment and spreading positive word-of-mouth about a business, a viral marketing campaign can evolve in the opposite direction and become a major negative issue for some companies. Negative campaigns are especially favored by the fact that consumers are more likely to spread word-of-mouth and create buzz about something they do not like or about negative situations. This applies to situations when people start posting negative information about a brand or product on review websites, online stores, or blogs; many consumers will take this information at face value, consider it in their purchases, and even spread it within their social circles.

Even more risky are the situations when a positive viral marketing campaign transforms into a negative viral campaign at the initiative of consumers. Many marketing campaigns that did not benefit from efficient and high-quality research before their creation can be perceived by consumers as dishonest, hypocritical, annoying, or intrusive, and that might persuade them to react in a negative manner. Consumers' negative reactions to this type of campaigns are limited to not only not forwarding the marketing message but also to acting and creating their own negative viral campaigns to voice their criticism, dissatisfaction, and frustrations.

One such case of a marketing campaign, initiated with the intention of becoming viral in the social media, that actually backfired was McDonald's "#Meet the Farmers" campaign on Twitter. At the beginning of 2012, McDonald's launched a campaign featuring paid-for tweets, which would appear at the top of search results. Its decision included an initial Twitter hashtag #MeetTheFarmers, meant to promote the brand's guarantee of

fresh produce and to exhibit stories about farmers who sell their produce to the fast-food company. The campaign was intended to last 24 hours and in its initial phases, at least, it appeared to work. McDonald's initially tweeted: "Meet Dirk Giannini, McDonald's lettuce supplier, as he shows u his life on the farm #MeetTheFarmers." However, after a couple of hours the company posted two tweets with the more general hashtag #McDStories, including "when you make something with pride, people can taste it." When McDonald's however changed the hashtag to #McDStories, consumers' reactions began to get negative very quickly. The hashtag was hijacked by angry customers who posted negative and derogatory Tweets like: "Watching a classmate projectile vomit his food all over the restaurant during a 6th grade trip. #McDStories," "These #McDStories never get old, kinda like a box of McDonald's 10 piece," "Ordered a McDouble, something in the damn thing chipped my molar. #McDStories," "Hospitalized for food poisoning after eating McDonalds in 1989. Never ate there again and became a Vegetarian. Should have sued #MCDStories," "McDonald's is responsible for the slaughter of billions of defenseless animals every year. #MeetTheFarmers who aid the murder." Twitter users continued to criticize McDonald's products, ingredients, and taste, and after two hours the company removed the #McDstories hashtag, but it did leave the #MeetTheFarmers hashtag, which did not attract so much criticism initially (Mandel 2012; Roberts 2012).

Marketers need to pay attention to the important role that words and messages play for the success of viral marketing. Whereas McDonald's #MeetTheFarmers hashtag received a mostly positive response, the company's decision to change and focus consumers even more on their brand was perceived as hypocritical, intrusive, and negative by Twitter users, who reacted immediately. Another aspect that needs to be noticed in relation to the evolution of this campaign is the consumers' determination to act and respond negatively when a marketing message is perceived as unwelcome, unethical, and not fit for the particulars of the brand and the situation. Whenever users get too annoyed or angry about the message of a campaign, they are more determined to act and the specifics of the online environment help them in this sense. Another key element to be noted is the lack of control that marketers have once a message is launched in social media. In this communication platform, the control is in the hands

of consumers, friends, and followers. The McDonald's example shows the necessity for the brand to respond, do damage control, but remain (or become) honest about it. Whereas the negative #McDStories hashtag was taken off by McDonald's, the positive one, #MeetTheFarmers, was maintained on Twitter. However, the story about McDonald's Twitter campaign made the rounds in social media and in traditional media around the globe; consumers heard about it, and the negative image remained, even though, or even more because, the company removed the problematic keywords.

Another case of a good strategy gone bad is one of the first attempts to incite consumers to create user-generated advertising. In 2006, when YouTube was gaining significant popularity and the use of online platforms in advertising was very trendy, General Motors, teaming up with NBC's *The Apprentice*, decided to encourage consumers to create their own Chevrolet Tahoe commercials by offering an online video editing interface that allowed consumers to edit clips, insert text, and add visual and sound effects. GM was hoping that consumers would share their own videos around the Web and generate buzz for the company's Chevy Tahoe through user-generated viral advertisements (Bosman 2006). Although the campaign generated significant consumer involvement, discussions, and activity on YouTube, it was not in the way that GM had hoped. Besides the trend for high Internet usage, online marketing, and user-generated campaigns, the creators of the Chevy Tahoe campaign forgot another trend affecting consumer attitudes, namely, their desire to be green and pay attention to the environment. This was the reason why the user-generated content was overwhelmingly negative, given Tahoe's not very environmentally friendly size and gas consumption. Instead of focusing on the benefits and advantages of this type of car, consumers' advertisements and messages were extremely negative such as: "Our planet's oil is almost gone. You don't need GPS to see where this road leads" and "Like this snowy wilderness? Better get your fill of it now. Then say hello to global warming" (Bosman 2006). Many of the videos resulting from the Chevy Apprentice campaign are still available today on YouTube and have accumulated millions of views.

Even major players on the marketing scene, such as Pepsi, have gotten their share of criticism and negative campaigns for their online and mobile

media initiatives. For example, in 2009 Pepsi tried to use the increasingly popular mobile platform to promote its new energy drink, AMP. Pepsi created a video and a free iPhone application, AMP UP Before You Score. The target market was young male consumers, who would have benefited from the application by receiving advice on how to score with 24 categories of women. The application suggested users' pick-up lines and restaurants and allowed users to brag in social media about their conquests because of Pepsi. Although the initiative was successful with some representatives of their target market, the general public characterized it as sexist and degrading, and finally the company abandoned it (Picchi 2009). More recently, AMP reoriented its promotional strategy by using athletes to promote its products and target their key market segments.

The entertainment industry is not exempt from viral marketing flops that not only do not work but also backfire. To promote their "end of the world" movie *2012*, Columbia Pictures launched a viral marketing campaign that included teaser trailers and a fake website. One of the teaser trailers showed a tsunami crashing over the Himalayas and stated that the world would end in 2012. The fake website represented the so-called "Institute for Human Continuity." The website stated that for 25 years the Institute had been assessing threats to the continuation of mankind and the "odds of global destruction" in 2012 had been confirmed at 94 percent. In addition, the website encouraged users to register for the lottery (actually for movie sweepstakes) to "ensure their chances of survival." The movie's promoters might have overestimated the public's sense of humor and capacity to recognize a prank; they received a lot of negative feedback when individuals started contacting authorities, including NASA, about the fake statements of the campaign and the world ending in 2012 (McGurk 2009). Despite these negative results, the viral strategy did manage to generate buzz and discussions related to the movie and their viral marketing attempt, showing that, sometimes, even negative marketing experiences can be useful and present an opportunity for marketers.

All these examples of viral marketing campaigns, created by major companies with significant experience in the advertising and promotion world, show that viral marketing has specific characteristics that makes it distinct from traditional promotions and that it requires significant

research and analysis before formulating a strategy. Marketers need to know the profile of their target market very well and be able to pretest and anticipate consumers' reactions to specific commercial messages and advertising appeals. Just because something worked for one company or brand does not necessarily mean that it will work for other companies, especially if the profile and the target market are different.

Besides entertaining characteristics, honesty and straightforwardness usually accompany viral campaigns; so forcing consumers' attention on the brand (as it happened in McDonald's case) is not going to sit well with users. In viral marketing campaigns, consumers are and need to feel in control instead of feeling they are being manipulated by the company. Although the businesses give up control in favor of social media users and allow them to take over the campaign, marketers need to constantly monitor the evolution of the situation and intervene, if necessary, with changes, clarifications, and answers to consumers' complaints. These are special strategies that need to be considered when the company is facing a negative campaign, as we discuss in the following section.

Negative Is Positive

Traditional marketing knowledge notes that consumer complaints and negative messages are important from at least two points of view. First, research has shown that consumers who complain have a relationship with the brand and care about the specific situation. Second, any communication from consumers, including negative messages, represent a way for the company to receive feedback and ideas about what needs to be improved and changed about its products, services, and operations. This is why customer complaints can represent a source of knowledge and intelligence for any company that knows how to manage them.

Because of the widespread use of the Internet, it is easy for consumers to express their feelings online, especially when they are dissatisfied or angry. Although some consumer-generated content, including reviews and social media posts, is positive, there is significant negative content online that can affect a brand's image if these situations are not professionally managed. In addition, researchers have noted that certain types of negativity may be more important to address because they are more

likely to be shared, especially in a social media context. Customer experiences that evoke anxiety or anger are more likely to be transmitted to others than those that create feelings of sadness. This makes it more important for marketers to provide resolutions for experiences that make consumers anxious and angry rather than disappointed (Berger and Milkman 2012). This aspect is especially important for high commitment items such as automobiles, mobile phones, and long term subscription services, when negative word-of-mouth can significantly affect consumers' attitudes, satisfaction with the product, and future purchase behavior.

It is important for businesses to be able to find and react to any negative messages from consumers. One of the best ways to show responsiveness to customer complaints is by rapid, efficient, and polite managing of legitimate dissatisfactions. This can diffuse the situation, lead to improved operations within the company, and, by efficient responsiveness, marketers may avert negative word-of-mouth. Companies that are able to positively solve customers' complaints might even be able to create positive word-of-mouth from a negative situation. This is why researchers recommend that, in dealing with complaints, marketing specialists must examine not only the costs of the solution but also the costs of not solving the complaint (Richins 1983). These word-of-mouth costs are not easy to assess; however, the potential of negative word-of-mouth to affect the company's image, especially in the Internet era, is significant and can derail any positive promotion strategies the brand might have.

In the context of viral marketing and the use of the Internet and social media, we discussed in the previous sections how easy it is for consumers to express their dissatisfaction and anger in the online environment, with viral diffusion potential. Online consumers' complaints posted through different tools, including Tweets, Facebook updates, and videos on YouTube, have been extremely successful so far and, as we discussed in the case of United Breaks Guitars, have accumulated millions of views that affected the company's image. In relation to this example, we underlined a few of the company's initiatives to deal with the situation once everything became public, including their plan to use the complaint video in their internal training sessions and a small donation to a music institute in the account of the guitar damages the company produced. However, the response was seen as too little, too late, and did not do enough to

significantly change the company's image. A positive outcome from this situation came for the company producing Taylor guitars, which reacted fast, took a positive initiative, and replaced the damaged guitar.

Many other companies have even more significant issues, with employees caught on film while offering very poor customer service and making stupid decisions that end up hurting customers. One such situation, though there are many in this category, is recorded in a video posted on YouTube before Christmas Day of 2011. A customer recorded on a home video surveillance camera a FedEx delivery person throwing a new computer monitor over a home's front gate. The customer was able to get a very clear shot of the action, including the FedEx truck in the background. The consumer was even able to note that his front door was wide open and he was home expecting the package. The video received more than one million views before Christmas and consumers around the world were able to see the FedEx brand in a very compromising situation. However, the company fired back before Christmas with a video of its own and with Matthew Thornton, their senior vice president of U.S. Operations, stating that the employee in the video was disciplined and will not be working with customers anymore. His declaration stated that:

Along with many of you, we've seen the video showing one of our couriers carelessly and improperly delivering a package the other day.... I want you to know that I was upset, embarrassed, and very sorry for our customer's poor experience. This goes directly against everything we have always taught our people and expect of them. It was just very disappointing.

The videos continue to be public on YouTube and the original video showing the computer being thrown over the fence has accumulated approximately 10 million views until 2013. While the negative example of how some employees of FedEx do the job is still available online, the company was at least able to react fast in posting an online response through its own video. The company did not try to be hypocritical or to avoid taking responsibility, and by providing apologies and an explanation on how the situation was remediated, they were able to underline the quality level of their service and their customer orientation.

On a similar note, another recent case is represented by the USPS delivery woman driving over a customer's lawn in order to deliver a package. The video received millions of views and was featured in the national media. USPS's response to one of the news outlets only stated that "this behavior is obviously not acceptable and is being addressed. The majority of our employees are incredibly hard-working individuals who go above and beyond the call of duty daily" (Grenoble 2013). The company could have taken advantage of the situation to underline their procedures and their preoccupation with customer service and to specify the measures taken to solve and *prevent situations of this type*.

There is no better example related to the benefits of fast and positive reaction as well as showing preoccupation for customers' satisfaction and well-being than the Tylenol case in 1982. When seven people died in Chicago because of Tylenol tainted with potassium cyanide in a store, the company decided to recall all its medication on the market, valued at over \$100 million, even though the contamination was a criminal act that did not have anything to do with the company and its supply chain. Although initially the company had to suffer financially and had a sharp decrease in its stock price, in just a couple of years Tylenol became the favorite brand on the market because of the company's care and preoccupation with the welfare of its consumers and its fast reaction in making sure the situation was remedied, even though they were not at fault and lost a significant amount of money.

Under these circumstances, marketers need to understand that the way they handle image crises, customer complaints, and negative buzz will affect how consumers see their brand almost as much as the initial complaints and negative reviews. Negative word-of-mouth and consumer-generated content needs to be monitored and solved in an efficient and public manner. It is important for any type of company or brand to constantly monitor its online presence, consumer reviews, blogs, social media posts, videos, and other communications and look out for any potentially damaging messages that users might post online. Businesses can monitor the presence of their name in different social media communications as well as the comments and reviews posted on review websites, online retailers, forums, and other communities, including blog posts from users and, in particular, online consumer influencers. Responding

publicly to consumer complaints and negative feedback and offering a resolution presents a way to satisfy the respective customer and to show other consumers that the company is preoccupied with the quality of its products, services, and the relationship with consumers.

In dealing with negative feedback and user-generated content, marketers need to remember a few important points that can help a business transform a negative situation into an opportunity to send positive messages to consumers:

- Negative word-of-mouth can be even more influential and have a higher impact on consumer attitude and behavior than positive information.
- Unfavorable information about products and brands tends to carry greater weight with prospective buyers.
- Consumers can have a significant impact on a brand's image by creating negative viral campaigns.
- Positive viral marketing campaigns can become negative campaigns if consumers intervene with user-generated negative content.
- Unhappy consumers can create their own viral campaigns to complain about poor treatment.
- Brands should actively start a positive communication campaign to deal with the negative consequences of negative consumer messages.
- Marketers need to consider the important role that words and messages play in viral marketing.
- Consumers tend to act and respond negatively when a marketing message is perceived as unwelcome, unethical, and unfit.
- Customer complaints can represent a source of knowledge, intelligence, and positive actions.
- Solving customers' complaints has the potential to create positive word-of-mouth from a negative situation.
- Brands should constantly monitor their online presence, including consumer reviews, blogs, and social media posts from consumers.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions

As a result of recent technological developments and widespread consumer access to new ways of communication, the Internet allows an instant, direct, and interactive communication between businesses and consumers and encourages much more consumer involvement in the creation and distribution of marketing messages. With the new online and social media, consumers are better informed, better educated, and in control concerning media selection and the information tools and platforms they prefer to use for commercial information (Keller 2009).

Even traditional media, including television, print, and radio, have become related to the Internet and social media. Consumers have started reading newspapers, watching TV shows, or listening to the radio online using computers and mobile technology, including smartphones and tablets. Brand communications have changed, and viral marketing has become one of the most significant marketing trends of recent years, with big brands and small companies taking advantage of the viral potential of the Internet and social media (Ferguson 2008). Under these circumstances, the widespread use of the Internet allows businesses to use the potential of new technologies in order to complement traditional advertising and word-of-mouth communication by promoting online and social media viral communication between users (Datta et al. 2005).

No matter if businesses exclusively use the new social media or use social media in combination with traditional communication platforms, overall they can take advantage of the high diffusion potential of the Internet, low costs for message placement and transmission, and capacity to target a wide range of consumer profiles. Consumers are starting to be more involved and interested in online viral marketing campaigns and intervene not only by forwarding messages posted by businesses but also by involving themselves in the creation of viral marketing content. Major players in the promotion and advertising market, such as Nike, T-Mobile,

McDonald's, Budweiser, and Levi's, have successfully used viral advertising in the online and social media platforms, including on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Brands are not only involving consumers in the diffusion of their commercial messages, but also in the creation of marketing content such as Doritos and their advertising competition for consumer created ads that are placed on television during the SuperBowl and further promoted on YouTube and other social media outlets.

This viral marketing trend started with the classic case of Hotmail and their commercial message placed at the end of every user's e-mail messages. The company successfully promoted their free e-mail service by including a message in each e-mail sent by their users; this represents a first step and is an example of using the power of user-to-user communication and diffusion potential in order to promote a message. Since Hotmail's viral messages more than 15 years ago, consumers are more interested in promotional campaigns using personal sources of marketing information and peer-to-peer communication and diffusion of messages. This is because of the widespread use of the Internet and social media, which is constantly increasing as access to new technologies becomes easier and less expensive. Statistics concerning Internet and social media usage show that in 2012, nearly one-third of U.S. online adults accessed the Internet multiple times per day and from multiple physical locations (Forrester Research 2012a). Consumers go online on a daily basis and connect on more devices than in previous years, especially because of the development and spread of mobile technologies. For example, in 2012, half of online adults owned a smartphone, and two-thirds owned multiple connected devices, and the tablet adoption rate had more than doubled since the previous year. The use of smartphones is widespread, with 53 percent of all Americans over 12 years old owning one, approximately 139 million individuals (Edison Research 2013). Moreover, tablet adoption is growing, with about 20 percent of the adults in the United States using one of the tablet brands available in the American market (Forrester Research 2012a).

The use of social media is in constant evolution, and the number of users is increasing from one year to another. In 2013 there were more than one billion unique users visiting YouTube each month, over 6 billion hours of video watched each month, and more than 100 hours of video uploaded on the website every minute. Facebook was counting

approximately 700 million daily active users, and 1.5 billion monthly active users. If Facebook were a country, it would be approximately the third largest regarding the size of its population, after China and India. Just imagine the benefits of being able to use the advantages and the capacity of social media to target hundreds of millions of consumers on just one website such as Facebook.

It is important to have information about the way consumers perceive and receive viral marketing messages and what persuades them to like an advertisement and forward it to their peers. This book organizes and clarifies the essential points about viral marketing to help marketing researchers, practitioners, small business owners, and students understand the advantages and benefits of using viral campaigns. We focus on what it takes to create a successful viral marketing campaign, from factors that can contribute to its increased diffusion potential to characteristics and appeals included in the marketing content.

Viral marketing campaigns usually begin with brands posting the marketing message on a variety of online platforms and especially on social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, that include videos. Viral marketing content is most often created or at least sponsored by the respective brand, even if, in some cases, viral messages are formulated by consumers. A key characteristic of viral marketing is the fact that the diffusion of the message takes place from user to user and is no longer paid as in traditional commercial messages placed on television. Marketers can take advantage of the diffusion potential and low-costs of social networks. However, for a viral campaign to be successful, its content needs to have distinct appeals and entertainment qualities that make consumers not only like the message but also pass it along to their social network. Some of the most successful viral campaigns so far have been creative, provocative, and included out-of-the-box content and viral marketing messages.

Another important aspect influencing the significant success of viral marketing is related to the advantages that are offered by social networks for the diffusion of the message. In this sense, there are different aspects to be considered by marketers when analyzing a social network and deciding where to place the message. One of these factors is the tie strength between the members of the network, which depends on different factors

such as frequency of contact, reciprocity, and friendship. Research has shown that weak ties create more opportunities for individuals to share information and communicate, whereas strong ties encourage members to interact within more dependent and closely related social circles. Numerous studies and laws formulated with regard to the diffusion of information in social networks show that the message is spread exponentially and has a much higher potential of diffusion than traditional communication and word-of-mouth between two individuals.

Social media websites take advantage of the viral potential of social networks and the capacity for a social media platform to spread to multiple members of a person's social circle. Consumers telling and inviting their friends, peers, and families about a social media website have led to widespread use of top social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, at the global level. The current trend shows a constantly increasing number of social media users, with hundreds of millions of users for top websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Marketers have numerous opportunities for domestic and international market targeting in top social media websites at very low costs and for a wide exposure to millions of users and consumers with diverse demographic and consumption profiles.

Besides the widespread use of social media, another trend shows an increasing number of mobile media users and social media access through mobile platforms. An important media is the mobile communication platform, which is continually evolving and creating new tools and applications. From this point of view, marketers can take advantage of a variety of mobile marketing tools, from mobile advertising to brand sponsored mobile applications. User-generated marketing messages and especially advertisements are new tools that lead to better interest, involvement, and behavioral outcomes from consumers. Besides traditional web tools used by businesses, viral marketing messages should be placed in different social media platforms to receive significant initial exposure.

Regardless of the platform targeted initially to seed the viral marketing message, it is important for viral content to stand out from the competition, be noticed, and forwarded; for this it should have key contagion characteristics, including elements of controversy, provocation, shock, incongruity, and surprise. Emotional appeals are widely used and very successful in viral marketing because they attract consumers' attention,

create higher levels of curiosity, do not raise the viewers' natural defenses when it comes to commercial messages, and require less processing effort from those exposed to the ad. Emotional marketing content is easier to recall and has the capacity to lead to behavioral changes more immediately than logic, information, and arguments.

Out of the numerous types of advertising appeals that can be employed in a promotional campaign, practice has shown so far that the most successful appeals used in viral advertising include humor and sexual content. Humor in advertising has a significant positive effect on consumers' attention, recall of the ad and the brand, as well as advertising comprehension. Humor can positively impact consumers' attitudes toward the brand and reduce irritation experienced from the commercial. Sexual appeals are able to attract attention and generate interest, and advertising with sexual content and nuances can generate more consumer buzz and discussions about it. However, the success of advertisements using humorous or sexual appeals and based on emotions depends on the profile, cultural characteristics, and preferences of target consumers. This is why the use of sexual appeals has many times led to controversy, criticism from the consumers and the society, and to many commercials, such as Agent Provocateur, being banned from television for being too sexy. The advertising appeal selected needs to be relevant and appropriate to the brand and context of the advertisement to not generate negative feedback. Besides humorous and sexual appeals, some successful viral advertisements have used content based on violence and messages that elicit strong emotions, including fear and sadness; such messages are likely to be forwarded by consumers.

In addition to viral marketing campaigns that are based exclusively on the use of social media and the benefits of the Internet, marketers can use successful hybrid viral campaigns, which take advantage of the low costs and high diffusion potential of the Internet and the benefits of traditional media in targeting multiple segments of consumers. Hybrid marketing campaigns can either start in traditional media to tease and motivate consumers to visit an extended and more targeted online content or can begin as online campaigns that create consumer buzz and subsequently draw traditional media coverage. Besides hybrid campaigns that use both online and traditional media, businesses have used successfully

unbranded viral campaigns, which do not push a commercial message to consumers and benefit from more authenticity, entertainment, and differentiation from traditional advertising. Unbranded advertisements raise consumer interest and curiosity, generate buzz, and, unlike traditional push-marketing, their messages focus on the personal experience of the brand. Managers need to keep in mind that viral marketing campaigns are ultimately driven and endorsed by consumers, who are in total control of the diffusion of the message.

Although marketers do not benefit from as much control and input as with traditional campaigns when it comes to the diffusion of viral messages, they can influence the evolution of a marketing message created with viral purposes by making sure that its initial seeding is in a favorable environment and attracts consumers' active participation with regard to consumption communication. From this point of view, market mavens are marketplace influencers characterized by early awareness of new products, shopping enjoyment, and increased communication about brands and shopping experiences. They are motivated to learn about products and brands and spread their knowledge to other consumers. Besides market mavens, who are inclined to read and share brand communications, there are the sources of information with higher credibility that have a significant impact on consumers' responses and purchasing behavior. Marketing messages received from credible sources are more likely to be evaluated positively and forwarded to other consumers. However, major market influencers, celebrities, and, especially, stealth viral marketing strategies need to be used only after significant research and analysis because they can receive a cold welcome, be criticized, and become negative campaigns run by consumers.

Another important aspect that still creates problems for businesses is related to the evaluation of results and measuring the success of a marketing campaign. This is because, many times, traditional marketing metrics are not enough or not fit for a viral marketing situation. Viral marketing campaigns can have a purpose and objectives different than traditional marketing content. Companies should formulate and use specific and adapted quantitative measures that can help them evaluate the success of a campaign and assess their social media promotions' return on investment. Marketers should award significant attention to the campaign's objectives and correlate them to the evaluation metrics used.

When measuring the success of a viral marketing strategy, businesses need to consider that the economic benefits of viral promotions come from building widespread brand awareness, appreciation, and from higher consumer interest, product trials, and sales. For a better formulation of expected outcomes, the objectives of a viral marketing campaign can be organized by grouping them into cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, and financial categories and selecting key expected results from each of these categories. The formulated objectives should then be correlated to corresponding metrics from the respective category for companies to be able to constantly monitor the results and success of a campaign and assess potential changes and improvements. Marketers should consider new approaches of evaluating success by taking into consideration consumers' motivations for using social media. Viral marketing metrics should focus not only on return-on-investment measures and short-term benefits for the brand, but also on long-term results and benefits. The evaluation of viral advertising results should include measures of awareness and reach and focus on behavioral responses such as conversion rate, preference, and sales creation or increases.

Nonetheless, whereas marketers need to remain positive and formulate viral marketing messages to attract consumers' attention and improve their attitude toward the brand, there are also situations when brands are faced with negative consumer reactions, dissatisfied customers, and users unhappy with the message and content of a viral campaign. All of these are situations of extreme importance for any business, especially given the fact that negative word-of-mouth can be even more influential and have a higher impact on consumer attitude and behavior than positive information. Furthermore, unfavorable information about products and brands tends to carry greater weight with prospective buyers. Besides negative consumer messages posted online, from reviews to blog posts, mostly because of circumstances and products that left them unhappy with the purchase experience, consumers can have a significant impact on a brand's image by creating negative viral campaigns. Unhappy consumers can even create their own viral campaigns in order to complain about poor treatment and experiences and can negatively impact a brand's image.

Positive viral marketing campaigns can also become negative campaigns if consumers have strong negative feelings toward them and

become involved and motivated enough to intervene with user-generated negative content. Consumers tend to start acting and respond negatively when a marketing message generates negative emotions because it is perceived as unwelcome, unethical, and unfit.

Given the impact that negative communications can have on the image and prestige of a brand, as well as on future purchases, businesses should actively start a positive communication campaign to deal with the negative consequences of complaining consumer messages. Instead of avoiding consumer complaints or negative reviews and online posts, marketers should keep in mind that customer complaints can represent a source of knowledge, intelligence, and an opportunity for positive actions. Solving customers' complaints has the potential to create positive word-of-mouth from a negative situation and can help companies show that they are interested in the satisfaction of their customers. Under these circumstances, brands should constantly monitor their online presence, including consumer reviews, blogs, and social media posts from consumers and intervene as soon as possible with positive messages and solutions.

Marketers need to take into consideration a few key aspects when formulating, monitoring, and evaluating a viral marketing campaign, including the platforms where the message will be posted and the category of ad appeals and their relevance for the advertised brand and its target market. Businesses also need to have in place clear objectives and metrics to help monitor the evolution of a viral campaign and decide on potential contingency plans and changes that might be needed, especially if dealing with negative feedback.

This book should benefit and bring useful information to a broad audience, including marketing practitioners, students, and professors in business and communication schools, as well as business managers interested in promoting their brands through the new marketing and new media tools.

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Dr. Maria Petrescu is a marketing researcher and Assistant Professor of Marketing at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. She has an international background in marketing and communication and, in addition to conference presentations, is the author of several publications in journals such as *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, *Journal of Internet Commerce*, *International Journal of Business Information Systems*, and *Journal of Promotion Management*.

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