



What makes a marketing campaign a viral success?

A descriptive model exploring the mechanisms of viral marketing

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Abstract

What makes some marketing campaigns so immensely big and well known when they are marketed through social media or with a viral approach? How can a company reach out to customers through viral marketing and how can they make use of today's social media to achieve it? In this article we will try to understand and further explore what a campaign have to accomplish in order to achieve a viral spread, using a descriptive model which uses a number of factors and terms necessary in order to properly analyze viral marketing campaigns. This model as it stands today is at its first steps towards being a tool for producers to incorporate in their analytic research and design process when creating viral campaigns.

Keywords

Viral marketing, social media, word-of-mouth, alternate reality game

1. Introduction

Marketing in social environments on the web have become more and more common as people begin to spend more time on the web surfing, chatting or just keeping in touch with friends and family. Using this behavior a very effective marketing technique has emerged using the web and its users. Helm (2001) mentions that in 1998, viral marketing became the Internet buzzword of the year, so the term is by no means a new approach to marketing. Viral marketing is a marketing technique that focuses on customers and users spreading information about a product or brand.

We constructed a descriptive model to analyze a number of campaigns. This model is intended as support for producers of viral marketing campaigns where development is needed. Understanding how one can use viral marketing to produce a successful marketing campaign is the main goal of this article and to explore how the model functions when applied to viral marketing campaigns. By doing this we will try to understand the different mechanisms that construct a successful viral campaign.

The target audience of this article are marketing companies who strive to learn more about the ways of viral marketing, students in design and marketing who aim to know more about their respective fields before graduation but also people who is generally interested in viral marketing and its functions and mechanisms.

Understanding viral marketing and its mechanisms when designing campaigns that strive for viral spread makes it important to further understand credibility of sources on the Internet. The credibility of a company is in many cases not as high to customer as for example the credibility of a friend. We believe that understanding viral marketing mechanisms and techniques is of importance when trying to reach out to a broad audience but also helps one open new doors within marketing which in turn can lead to immersive events in a campaign. Immersive events in viral marketing are events that keep the audiences

focused upon the campaign or the product with high intensity and over a longer period of time. All this is greatly helped by the word-of-mouth (WOM) phenomena. Richins & Root-Shaffer (1988) defines WOM as the process of transferring information from person to person and plays a major role in customer buying decisions. We will further define the terms social media, social network sites and viral marketing.

2. Social media and social network sites as a subcategory

Boyd et al (2008, page 211) defines social network sites by these three terms:

“We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.”

One very widely known example of a social network site is Facebook, a website that gives it's users the possibility to share and take part of their friends interests and daily activities, through updates and messages but also pictures and links. Another example is the microblog Twitter where users can easily, with brief texts or tweets¹, update their followers².

Although social network sites is a subcategory to social media which contains more than web services and sites that enables communication between users. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, page 61) defines social media as:

“Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.”

One can distinguish other kinds of social media when thinking of it as applications on the Internet. Applications with their own ideas around communication and content. One very good example of this is YouTube, which focuses heavily on user-generated content but with another approach than Facebook or Twitter. Through YouTube users can share short video clips instead of the otherwise usual text updates. YouTube can in some sense be seen as a video blog for their users when the main focus is upon sharing video instead of text, although the option is present.

Some social media with a more niche approach have become more and more popular the last years. One of these is called location-based social media where software, preferably a smartphone, uses GPS to track positions, communicate and interact with other users and places. Examples of this are the applications Gowalla and FourSquare. These applications

¹ Tweets are messages and updates which users write on their personal page.

² Followers are the users who have subscribed to your page and updates.

let's the user check-in and share the places she finds interesting or visits often. A function of these applications is the ability for users to find items³, which encourages the users to use the application for fun.

Social media can be thought of as places, forum or instances which connects people through venues on the web which in turn allows social interaction and user generated content in many different ways. We have chosen to define social media as a place or a function that allows users to communicate, directly or indirectly through actions or updates with a heavy focus upon user generated content and designation of friends, groups or subscribers.

3. Viral marketing

Viral marketing refers to marketing techniques that thrives on viral spread, this means using techniques to reach customers and further use them to enhance the spread. Hespos (2002) mentions that viral marketing *“stands for a company’s activities to make use of customers’ communication networks to promote and distribute products.”*

Understanding WOM and its mechanisms can help a company to achieve this. Misner (1994) means that WOM marketing is the world’s most effective marketing strategy but also the least understood. Viral marketing campaigns can take many different forms and take use of many different media such as video clips, images, links, text messages and even flash memories. The aim of using viral marketing is generally not to maximize profits but rather to raise brand awareness. Another definition is presented by Porter and Golan (2006, page 29), which further states that viral marketing takes use of the audience communication:

“Viral advertising is unpaid peer-to- peer communication of provocative content originating from an identi-fied sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others.”

The unpaid peer-to-peer communication Porter and Golan talks about within viral marketing can be thought of as the usage of existing social network sites such as YouTube or Facebook where potential customers reside.

A central term in viral marketing is cross-media, which combines the different forms of which the campaign can take. Hilde et al. (2010, page 69) mentions this about cross-media and marketing that makes use of the term:

“In so-called multimedia campaigns or cross-media campaigns, marketers seek to maximize the effectiveness of their budgets by exploiting the unique strengths of each medium.”

Using cross-media as a base and an important factor, many viral marketing campaigns tries to engulf the user in an alternate reality game (ARG) where certain rules apply and goals are presented to the participants. In such a campaign difference between users engagement can

³ Items can be found at certain places by checking-in. These are stored in a collection.

surely be found, some users spend a lot of time solving puzzles and passing on information while others only check up on the campaign when new information is found and shared. Helm (2001) talks about customer integration in the marketing process and mentions low integration and high integration. An example of low integration is when a user simply forwards an email to a friend or liking ⁴something on a Facebook page. The high integration customer on the other hand spends a lot of time with the campaign and engages in it intensely. Examples of this can be when a user follows an ARG throughout a campaign and frequently spreads information.

42 Entertainment see this as a key ingredient in the making of their campaigns and have come up with a three part model showing the different kinds of users that engage in their campaigns (42 Entertainment). The casual participant represent the broadest audience which they engage mainly online through forums and social media. They offer little to the community and often only want to see how the campaign unfolds. The active participant represents the middle segment of the model. They interact with the campaign and the community both online and offline and they are engaging in their own pace. The third segment is the enthusiastic participant. These participants are smallest in numbers but they engage with the campaign very intensely through both online and offline means. The enthusiastic participant is so deeply immersed and engaged in the campaign that they provide the rest of the community with their own content and help spread information about

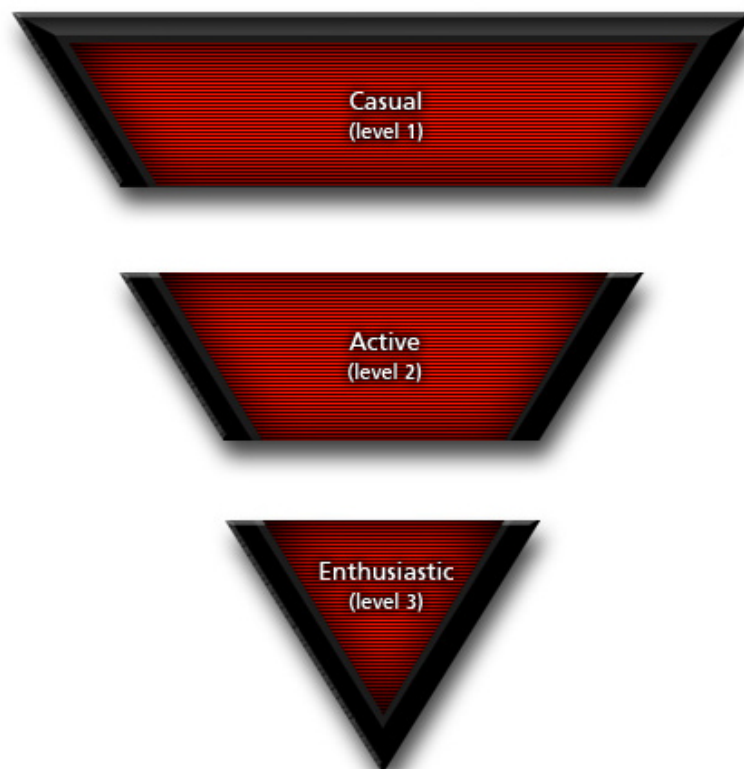


Figure 1. 42 Entertainment's different kinds of engagement
Source: 42 Entertainment

⁴ Facebook give the user the ability to show their appreciation to things people write and upload by a simple click of a button. <http://www.facebook.com>

the campaign through WOM. Although as a producer cannot control the spread of a campaign to any great extent, the WOM factor of a campaign can become a negative thing. Since WOM translates to a customer's potential communication with other Internet users, WOM is not always positive for a company. Helm (2001) mentions a number of so called 'hate sites' where customers explain their negative opinions about a company, instead of promoting them. Some of the examples mentioned are Wal-Mart and Microsoft. Viral marketing can also be difficult to control once the WOM process has begun. Information passed on through WOM can be altered and biased by every individual that takes part of it. In the end the results the company was expecting might be something else and instead have lead to an adverse selection of customers (Akerlof 1970).

We define viral marketing as strategies used to reach out to a broad audience and using this audience as a force to start a snowball-effect. The effect further catches the interest of more people through WOM between users in social media or other social venues on the Internet such as e-mail, chat, phones, software or web-services. Often but not always is cross-media thinking involved in such campaigns to further intrigue the audience. To explore the mechanisms of viral marketing, we will use a model that tries to explain this.

4. A descriptive viral marketing model

We believe that solutions to successful viral marketing campaigns must include some vital parts, which (1) *engages* the users, (2) *rewards* them and have a (3) *social* factor. We have talked about high and low integration before when it comes to customer engagement and we believe that these terms can be applied to both the social aspect and the rewarding aspect of the model as well. By using different integration levels we show what the campaign is able to offer the customers in terms of engagement, rewards and the social factors, and also to what extent the levels can be utilized in the campaign. These integration levels are divided into three: low, mid or high, based on a list of criteria that is explained within each factor where a high integration level is preferred. To achieve a high integration level a campaign must include most of the criteria mentioned in each of the factors. The integration level is considered as mid if these criteria are met but are not used frequently or well enough to earn a high integration level. Also, if only some of the criteria are met, the integration level is considered mid. If none or very few of the criteria are met. By building a campaign around these terms we believe it has great prospects to achieve a viral spread.

4.1 Engaging

It is important that a campaign has the ability to light a spark of emotion (Phelps et al. 2004). Engagement or engaging thus means that the user must become captivated by the campaign in some way in order to gain interest in it and further keep that interest high enough to decide to spend their time on it. This might be a common thing to point out and some people might be thinking; of course a user must be engaged and interested to take part of a product or campaign. Although this might be true it is all the same a very important factor to consider. The engaging factor also means that the campaign should be constructed in some way that gives the audience an opportunity to engage and affect the campaign rather than

just pass through it. An ARG is built upon user engagement in this way but is by no means restricted to ARG's.

Criteria for an engaging campaign:

- The ability to captivate the user into the campaign.
- Instances in which users can affect the campaign.

4.2 Rewarding

The rewarding factor is directed against the specific user. How can I as a user get something out of the campaign? Do I have an opportunity to get rewarded? How vast is the access for the audience to get the most out of the campaign as possible? Does a user located in Europe get the same opportunity to get rewarded through a campaign as a user in the U.S? If more people have access to the reward a campaign can offer, the rewarding factor is higher.

A reward can come in various forms depending on what kind of campaign the audience is following, for example new material and information for an ARG or special discounts on products. The quality and/or quantity of a reward weighs heavily on the reward factor, and how well it fits the campaign. A short video clip of a computer might not be satisfying as a reward for answering a survey for a computer company but a video clip might be the very best reward for completing an ARG. A reward should be something that the audience benefits from and sometimes may be expecting.

The rewarding factor is volatile as what is a reward for one user may not be a reward for another user. A reward is not necessarily something the company stands for; sharing information of a campaign can be a reward in itself in terms of giving credit to the finder of the information and further spreading it, making use of the WOM-factor. Further the first one to find something and the first to share that information to the other customers enjoys a reward in the form of compliments and acknowledgements from the whole community.

Criteria for a rewarding campaign:

- Access for as many as possible to be rewarded for their actions.
- The quality and/or quantity of the reward, how well the reward fits the campaign.
- The more users that benefits from one specific reward, the better.
- Sharing content to friends should benefit the user.

4.3 Social

The social factor is dependent on how well the campaign use social media as a tool for their audience to connect to each other. There are many ways of users to spread information about campaigns through their own means even outside of the campaign. Examples of this are the usage of social media that is not included in the campaign or by chat and mail conversations. This is not considered as making use of the social factor as the producers of the campaign is not involved in the customer process of spreading the information. If the campaign is actively leading the users to other social media sites the campaign is using social media as a tool in their campaign and therefore a social factor is involved.

It is still important that a campaign that desires to become viral have a social factor to them, possibly through existing social media or using an own website. The social factor does not only refer to how the users connect to each other but also how the company connects to its users. The WOM factor is a very important term to keep in mind when creating campaigns but it is important to distinguish between the possibility of social connections that a campaign can offer the audience and the WOM phenomena that may arise during and after it has finished. While a campaign may only offer low social integration in terms of connecting users, WOM can still occur on the user's own accord outside of the campaign.

Criteria for a social campaign:

- Connects the users through existing social media or self-developed web services or applications.
- Communication between the audience and the campaign/company.

5. Method

We have chosen a few viral campaigns that all have become viral successes in their own meaning. When we first began to look at the many different types of campaigns we found a lot of material we could use in our analysis. When we decided what campaigns to use we chose these from a few criteria and decided the campaigns first and foremost must have reached viral success but also that they had to be very different to each other. We felt that analyzing very similar campaigns may not have given the wider view we were searching for, regarding the factors and criteria of the model, but instead give the model a very narrow field to analyze.

The first one, Old Spice became an Internet phenomenon with the use of video sharing. The reason we chose to analyze this campaign was because it was such a hot topic in viral marketing as this was one of the fastest growing viral campaigns we found. My Starbucks Idea uses the strength of communities to achieve viral success. My Starbucks Idea was chosen because of being a campaign that constructed its own community instead of relying on other social media to spread their information. In this community the users could gather online and together work towards improving the Starbucks experience. Nine Inch Nails and 42 Entertainment used ARG to great lengths in their Year Zero campaign. This one was chosen by the fact that it is an ARG, which is very different form a video campaign or setting up a social website, and due to the vastness and complexity of it. Also we sought after a campaign that held the well-developed details this ARG does which are many because of the use of cross-media. The campaign also did present a great communication between users and campaign, which we found interesting. BMW was ahead of their time with The Hire, being a viral success long before the other campaigns. It is a very interesting campaign to analyze and we chose it because it differs so much from the other campaigns. Like Old Spice it is also a video campaign but when it was produced in 2001 it did not have access to the social media Old Spice had when it was produced in 2010. This means that BMW: The Hire had very different conditions for becoming a viral success compared to the Old Spice campaign but still The Hire campaign became viral.

We begin by explaining the different campaigns, how they started, what their purpose is/were and how successful they have become. After this introduction we analyze the campaigns one by one on the basis of the three terms and their integration levels. Further we make a comparison between the campaigns to better understand what makes the terms different in each case.

Further we must define the usage of the different integration levels and how we analyze the campaigns through them. The integration levels are a measurement of how much the campaign in question is able to offer the audience. When we analyze the campaigns and choose to put a campaign in a certain area of the model e.g. high social, we mean that the campaign has the ability to offer the audience a high degree of social connection for example through existing social media. The levels are measured by different aspects explained in the model chapter. If all the criteria are met, the factor is considered high. If less than all criteria are met, it should be considered mid. If none or less than half of the criteria are met, the factor should be considered low.

		Integration levels		
		Low	Mid	High
Factors	Engaging			
	Rewarding			
	Social			

Figure 2. The model

6. Campaigns

6.1 Old Spice

Interest Over Time for 'old spice'

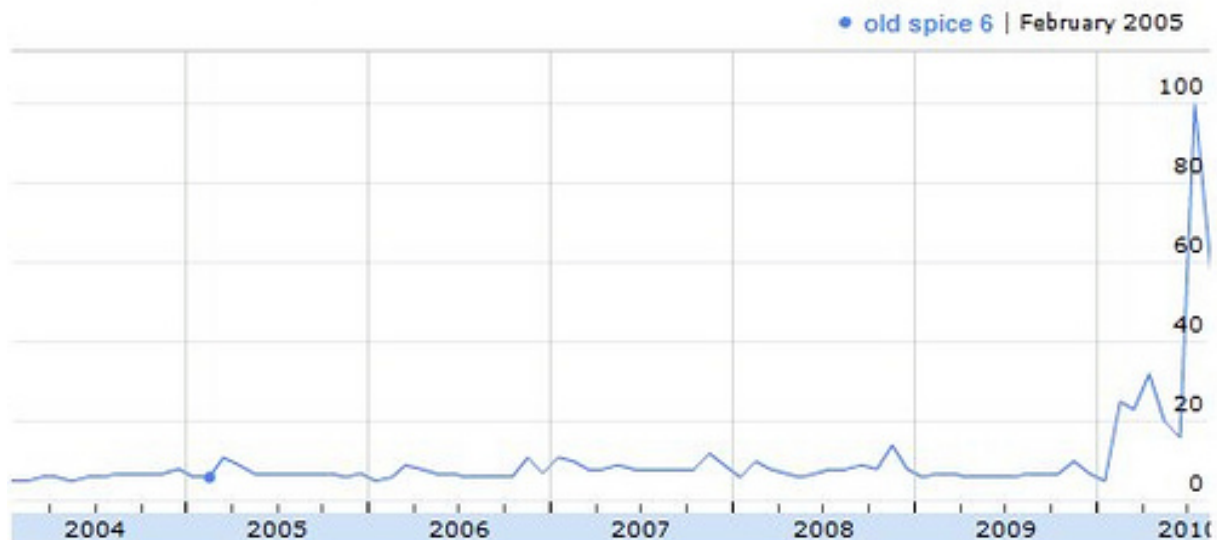


Figure 3. A view over how often the word "Old Spice" has been searched using Google.
Source: Google Insight

During Super Bowl in 2010, Old Spice broadcasted a commercial film where actor and former NFL wide receiver Isaiah Mustafa starring as "The Old Spice Guy" encouraged men to start using Old Spice bodywash to smell like a man. The campaign, by ad-agency Wieden + Kennedy, became a decent success. 13:th July Old Spice started making response videos on YouTube starring the same actor Mustafa replying on 186 online comments and questions by users of different communities such as Twitter, Facebook, Reddit⁵ and YouTube. This time the campaign made a huge success and the number of views exploded and further increased the sales of Old Spice bodywash products by 107 % by the end of that month. The video campaign is one of the fastest growing viral video ever (Ehrlich, 2010), garnering 6.7 million views after the first day. According to Wieden + Kennedy more people watched the videos in the first 24 hours than those who watched Obama's presidential victory speech. The popularity of the campaign made other companies follow the trend and made their own versions of the Old Spice guy, like Cisco and The Sun, but not limited to companies; the White House Press Secretary as well, answering questions on YouTube (Ehrlich, 2011). The Old Spice channel on YouTube has a total of over 200 million views from all their videos.

⁵ Reddit is a website that give its users the ability to upload content and other users to vote this content "up" or "down" with the most liked content being displayed on the first page of the website.

6.2 My Starbucks Idea

In 2008 the coffee shop brand Starbucks started a community called My Starbucks Idea where costumers could make ideas to improve the Starbucks experience. Everything from new coffee drinks to affiliate programs for frequent customers and interior decoration. Other customers can vote on ideas and discuss them and then Starbucks can see which ideas become the most popular and review them. The ideas are divided into different categories and you can sort them by most commented ideas, new ideas and Top All-Time. Around 100 000 ideas have been posted since the start. Starbucks also does daily surveys on the site, named 'question of the day' asking the users everything from what to name a coffee recipe to what Frappuccino's are their favorites. Economically speaking, Starbucks is saving lots of dollars by not doing expensive marketing research and instead letting the audience make their voices heard for free.

Vote **Buy 10 get 1 free!- ✓**

Posted on 5/13/2008 7:33 PM
by [redacted]

Would it be to hard to have a system, like all other coffee shops have, that if you buy 10 drinks then you can get the 11 free. You could do this with customers that have a starbucks card.

107,780 points

Hi, [redacted] here from the rewards team- thanks for your suggestion of a Buy 10 Get 1 Free program. This is an idea that is currently under review. I'll keep you posted along the way as we look into this idea.

Thanks again,
[redacted]

Comments [95]

Figure 4. One idea on My Starbucks Idea. Vote points to the left and a review from the rewards team. Source: My Starbucks Idea

6.3 Year Zero

In 2007 Trent Reznor, the mastermind behind the rock act Nine Inch Nails, promoted his upcoming album Year Zero trough an immersive campaign with the help of promotion-agency 42 Entertainment by making an ARG with the same name. The game focused on a dark future laid to waste from holy wars and environmental collapse. The game also consisted of various webpages, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, video links, mp3-files etc. which all where pieces of a puzzle. 42-entertainment uses a technique which they like to call "hiding in plain sight", where the information is often presented to the users but out of context. Users discussed the ARG on forums and communities and together came up with solutions to progress further on in the game, leading them to a resistance group which recruited the fans to fight the dark future of Year Zero. The game took place in not only the virtual world but also in the real world where, for example a secret performance act by Nine Inch Nails took place for the enthusiastic and especially devoted fans. Over 3.5 million people

took part in the campaign and Los Angeles times states that the Year Zero campaign is more than marketing, it is pioneering art. (42-Entertainment Year Zero Case Study 2008)

6.4 BMW Films: The Hire

The BMW films The Hire was a series of short films divided into two seasons where the actor Clive Owen played the lead role as a hired transporter, getting paid to chauffeur various people in different BMW's. Every episode in the series is released periodically and directed by different directors, from Guy Richie and John Woo to Ang Lee and Tony Scott. The series was released in 2001 with the aim to produce a non-traditional marketing campaign purely for the sake of branding. Hespos (2002) mentions this about the campaign:

“BMW knew that the average work-hard, play-hard customer was 46 years old, with a median income of about \$150,000. Two-thirds were male, married, and had no children. As BMW sliced and diced its market further, an interesting statistic surfaced: Roughly 85% of BMW purchasers used the Internet before purchasing a BMW.”

The Internet was the perfect place for such a campaign to take place knowing that roughly 85% of their customers researched the brand and the cars on the Internet beforehand. BMW set up a website which the audience registered on in order to download or stream the short films as well as customize a dream car from BMW. Over 10 million views counted and nearly 2 million people registered to the site with an astonishing 94% of the users recommended the video clips to others (Hespos 2002).

7. Analysis

7.1 Old Spice

The WOM spread of the Old Spice campaign is huge, using YouTube to respond to tweets and questions from other social media as we have seen was very important for the viewer explosion the clips experienced thereafter. One trigger that possibly helped the campaign reach a huge amount of users was that some of the response videos were targeted at famous blog writers, making them mention the campaign in their blogs.

Based on the start of the campaign, when there were only commercial videos shown during the NFL Super bowl and on TV commercials, the social factor was trivial by the fact that social medias were not used in the same degree as later, when the response videos started. The response videos were shown on an already established social media website, YouTube. Other also well-known social media websites such as Reddit and Twitter were used to gather questions and comments to respond to, weighting heavily on a social factor. So if we only look at the response video part there is huge social integration involved but the campaign as a whole do not offer the same high level of social integration, which brings the social factor to a mid level.

The Old Spice response videos is encouraging the users to go social and talk about Old Spice in social media to fuel the creation of new response videos. The real treat here is that

Mustafa is answering to real comments and questions by real users, making it more tempting to mention Old Spice in forums and communities when there is a chance that you could be mentioned in a video that is watched by thousands of users. The duration where the audience could affect the outcome was short though, only lasting for three days until it reached its last video. Much of the WOM continued after the last submitted response video, so many viewers didn't take part in contributing to the videos. The engagement factor goes down a level from high to mid by the fact that the duration of the response part was very short, ending up just being a YouTube channel with old videos. The same goes for the rewarding factor, being limited to the duration when Mustafa responded to the audience, and a very few in the audience were responded.

Engaging: Mid

Rewarding: Mid

Social: Mid

The Old Spice campaign is engaging the audience to a high level with the hopes of hearing their names in the response videos. This was during a short amount of time though and with a limited amount of videos not everyone could have their fair share of fame. Also, the first part of the campaign that was during the Super Bowl event did not offer nor require engagement, which brings the overall engaging factor and goes into the mid section of the model.

The rewarding factor is closely connected to the engaging factor since engagement by the users rewarded them. The opportunity to get rewarded is limited to a few users if the reward is to get mentioned in the videos. There is no direct reward for sharing the content to your friends, more than the credit the user gets from his/her friends. This reward though, is not by the campaign and thus the rewarding factor goes into the mid section.

The social factor is also affected by the difference of the campaign during Super Bowl and the campaign during the response part. In the first part of the campaign the social factor was trivial, offering a low social integration for the audience. In the later case, during the response videos, the social integration raised to a higher level by engaging the users to talk and discuss about Old Spice to get their names into the videos. The use of social media began as well, with the use of the social media video site YouTube as a channel to distribute the campaign. As mentioned in the engaging and the rewarding part, this response part was during a short amount of time, limiting the communication between the audience and the campaign, therefore going into the mid section as well.

7.2 My Starbucks Idea

By contributing to the community with new ideas, users are engaging themselves to hopefully be rewarded with the ideas becoming reality. With the leaderboard, users are encouraged to be active on the community, to be engaged and thus the leaderboard acts like a reward. Without users sharing their opinions, this campaign wouldn't work as intended. It's also hard to get something out of My Starbucks Idea if you are not engaged as a user. By being engaged Starbucks is rewarding their users by listening to their demands and ideas.

Instead of using already established communities, Starbucks is making their own for their own target audience. The benefits of doing this is that Starbucks gain more control of the interface and functions so that they can create the most suitable site for the purpose: sharing, commenting and voting on ideas. The disadvantage is that you are not making use of already established communities, where your customers are likely to be at, and feel familiar with. Now, the audience will have to make a new Starbucks.com account for this sole purpose, which could be a tiresome process for some, depending on how active in the community you are expecting to be. But Starbucks is using other social media sites in some ways. A feature called “Give a Gift” was announced in mid 2010 that let Facebook members give away pre-paid Starbucks card to their friends, worth between \$5 and \$500. This feature is actually one of many ideas that are to found on My Starbucks Idea produced by a user. All ideas can be shared on many different social media sites by a share button. My Starbucks Idea also has their own Twitter account, sharing news and answering other Twitter users questions. According to our terms of social factor, My Starbucks Idea is considered using a high social integration.



Figure 5. Leaderboard on My Starbucks Idea
Source: My Starbucks Idea

Starbucks started out on their own but is making use of already established communities. Since the whole campaign relies on users that is engaged in the community and is offering them the tools for that, the engaging factor is considered high. The rewarding part could be considered high since there is a great reward for good ideas that is contributed, not only for those who contribute them but also for everyone else that is voting on them. But how many ideas pass the reviews and become reality? There is no such number to find, if you are not reviewing each one of them separately. This is clearly thought of by Starbucks to not show the results. It would not look good to show a hundred of ideas and only a few of them being approved. This being in mind, we still can't judge a lower rewarding factor level by the fact that there is nothing that says otherwise, that many ideas may pass with flying colors. The final result is a mid rewarding factor – the rewards are great for the users of My Starbucks Idea, but not all users can take part of all the rewards.

Engaging: High
 Rewarding: Mid
 Social: High

My Starbucks Idea offers the tools for the users to be engaged through a vast community where ideas are easy to post and vote. The users are being engaged since they know they can make a change about a company they in some way have a relation to. It's not only the users that create subjects to discuss but Starbucks as well make daily surveys for the users to answer and discuss about. In return of the engagement by their users, My Starbucks Idea can be very rewarding, but this is limited since not all the users can take part of all the rewards.

We adopt in all likelihood that the users of the community are Starbucks customers but the rewards can be targeted to a limited set of users, maybe users in a specific region or just a certain coffee shop that is affected by the idea. By using a tailor-made community to connect the users with each other and the producers, and also using established social media network sites like Twitter and Facebook, to communicate with their users and give the users more ways to use social media (like in the Give a gift example) My Starbucks Idea earns a high level on the social factor.

7.3 Year Zero



Figure 6. Nine Inch Nails tour t-shirt.

Source: Wikipedia

The ARG that Reznor with 42 Entertainment created is vast and takes a lot of time to both figure out and be a part of. The first thing that gave the audience any indication that something was going on was the album website where 16 lines of zero's were presented. This was a list of the tracks the actual album and would later be revealed. With the selling of the tour t-shirt with a hidden message "IAMTRYINGTOBELIEVE" (www.iamtryingtobelieve.com) the fans were intrigued and did not see the message as a mere coincidence. The audience found out that there actually was a website registered to the name (42 Entertainment) and the campaign took off leading the audience into a long puzzle of distorted websites, secret messages and information about the ARG. Even the CD itself contained a hidden message to discover spelled out in binary code.

In the example of the t-shirt we notice that 42 Entertainment do take the idea of "hiding in plain sight" seriously and form their campaigns around the term. That can also be seen in the usage of the scrambled and distorted websites, which holds clues in links but also in morse code, inside audio files and even using telephones to give information to the audience. The term hiding in plain sight is a key part when designing a vast and intriguing ARG like Year Zero in terms of giving the audience just enough to progress but not too much in order not to make the ARG shallow. Another approach to engage the audience in the campaign is to try and bring forth a spark of emotion, which the Year Zero campaign did achieve. By telling a story, both on the album Year Zero and the ARG Year Zero, about a corrupt and broken land both ecologically and socially but first and foremost politically. This story was inspired by the, then, government of USA and portrayed a scenario of a possible future. The story was easy to

understand for some and very close to heart by others as the audience followed this campaign very vigorously. A great example of how very dedicated the audience was is the footage found on one of the websites created by 42 Entertainment (<http://opensource-resistance.net>). The footage shows a number of people taken to an unknown place in a bus with people they didn't know. When they arrived a leader within a resistance group held a fictional meeting. Later the audience was treated to a private show from Nine Inch Nails and the evening ended abruptly when police broke it up. 42 Entertainment and Reznor know the value of reward and in this case we can see a clear reward to the audience engagement in the campaign and the ARG by offering this private show.

Some parts of the campaign gives the audience chances to be very social but with its own limitations. Not only were there special forums to visit and discuss the ARG but also these forums were unofficial and made by fans themselves who gathered and shared information. Also as talked about before live performances and meetings were arranged by Nine Inch Nails themselves, which also limits the number of people that can access it. Although this campaign has its limitations with the social factor it is all the same a social campaign in terms of that it becomes easier to solve when working with other people. The social factor in any large campaign that utilizes an ARG is very important, by letting the audience be apart of something big and hopefully entertaining.

Engaging: High

Rewarding: Mid

Social: High

The Year Zero campaign definitely has a high engaging integration level through captivating the audience in both the story of the ARG and the album with its deep political bounds and complex puzzles. The audience can also affect the campaign in some way, by progressing through it and sharing information with each other.

The rewarding factor of the campaign was placed in the mid section of the model due to what extent the audience could access the campaign and its rewards. Though a user could follow the campaign online and solve parts of the puzzles, some were left out as in the case of the private show that was held in the US and also the telephone calls, which were restricted to US residents. People outside of the US could not access the whole campaign.

The social factor of the campaign was placed in the mid section of the model because of how the audience was able to interact with each other and the campaign itself. The campaign did not take use of any existing social media to spread information about the campaign and the users were left with unofficial forums and websites to socialize. Further the campaign limits the access of social content for the audience in terms of not being able to reach out to everyone. The private show held by Nine Inch Nails is an example of this.

7.4 BMW Films: The Hire

BMW knew their customer base very well and with that knowledge they created a like-able character in the short film with a widely known actor and co-actors. But the movie's lead actor and star is always the car that is driven.

Watching the episodes one can clearly see that BMW wanted to emphasize the different aspects of the cars and how it handled in various situations. The engaging factor of the campaign is the entertainment value that the short films have and this is also true for the rewarding factor. Although the reward was little for watching the videos the users of the website had a new short film to look forward to in the future. Even though the website held no especially social part the campaign surely held it, in the true spirit of WOM marketing, through the spread of the videos by the users themselves. This campaign surely manages a viral spread and as Hespos (2002) states *“never before (or since) had an automotive company taken such a strong stance to drive consumers to the Web...”*



Figure 7. Clive Owen and Madonna in "Star" – one of the episodes in The Hire.
Source: Youtube

We see that this campaign, being released in 2001, is surely before its time when social marketing and viral marketing were still very less frequently seen when compared to what we encounter daily ten years later. This makes the campaign even more interesting to research as the social factor is so very huge while the social media were still so very limited to forums, mail and chats. With 94% of the users recommending and spreading the videos through various web services this campaign can be seen as an important milestone of viral marketing.

This started a discussion about if The Hire campaign would be a different campaign if it were produced today. Although this campaign is indeed interesting it has aged and if BMW would make another season of BMW Films now the campaign would most likely not be very similar to the one released in 2001. Also, to make an account on BMW Films to watch the films today would be considered very tiresome with video sites like YouTube, where there is no requirement of making a user account. It's very likely to believe that BMW would make use of social media video sites if the campaign would be released today. It's important to know that those means of social media did not exist at that time, and we did not use the Internet in the same way we do today.

Engaging: Low

Rewarding: Low

Social: Low

The fact that this campaign was placed in the low section of all the factors makes it so interesting to analyze. How did it come to be that the audience and the users of the website spread the videos and the information of the campaign in such a vast degree? As we have mentioned earlier this campaign would most likely not be the same if it was executed today and maybe that is why this campaign became so successful. Users today and users ten years ago used the Internet on very different terms as it has evolved so much. The users of today may find it tiresome to create an account on a website in order to get hold of video clips when one can find them so very easily on websites as YouTube. Maybe that was the strength of the campaign, it came before social media had yet to become such a big phenomena and users of the Internet saw it as intriguing to be able to create an account just to get hold of video clips. Video clips starring a-list actors such as Clive Owen and directed by very well known directors like Guy Richie.

		Integration levels		
		Low	Mid	High
Factors	Engaging	The Hire	Old Spice	Year Zero My Starbucks
	Rewarding	The Hire	Old Spice Year Zero My Starbucks	
	Social	The Hire	Old Spice	Year Zero My Starbucks

Figure 8 – All the campaigns in their place

8. Discussion

When we first began building the model we looked at the campaigns and started mentioning a few factors we believed were of importance when aiming for a viral spread. These factors came to be engaging, rewarding and social. As we began to apply these terms to campaigns that had successfully become viral we saw that the terms could not be seen as three fixed states but must be viewed as having a connection between them and in some cases depended on each other. If a campaign is rewarding, it is probably also engaging. But this leads to more questions than answers. If a boring campaign rewards the audience with a free product, is that campaign engaging? Is the fact that you receive something for free engaging enough to make you work through it? Further questions appeared when thinking of this while looking at

the social factor. If it's rewarding to spread a campaign that you like with your friends to gain acknowledgment, does the social part rely on the fact that it is rewarding?

Further we discovered that one cannot just say that a campaign must be engaging, rewarding or have a social factor to it to become viral but instead we saw that the factors must be viewed as having different levels to them. After studies of the campaigns we decided that two levels of integration was not enough to compare the campaigns, so we included a mid-level integration to further distinguish the difference between the focus of the campaigns. An example of this is the difference between an ARG where people solve puzzles both online and offline in great communities, and a straightforward viral video campaign where focus lies elsewhere.

We noticed that engagement could take different forms and could not be decided using only different integrations levels. An example of this is My Starbucks Idea, where the whole campaign is built on engagement by making a user account, discussing and post new ideas, as opposed to the Old Spice videos which could be enjoyed without demanding of the audience to create a user account and posting new ideas. Instead, users engaged in Old Spice looked at the videos, and shared them to their friends while users engaged in Starbucks discussed and built new ideas around the Starbucks brand. Both offer similar levels of engagement but My Starbucks idea demands a higher level of engagement of the audience and therefore is placed in the high area of the model while Old Spice is placed in the mid area.

There are also different views within both the social and the rewarding factor. A difference is between online and offline integration. How well can the campaign reach its audience within these factors? The meetings that were arranged by Nine Inch Nails offered an offline social integration on a high level but the Year Zero campaign did not offer the same amount of social integration online as My Starbucks Idea which lead to the placing of Year Zero in the mid section in the social factor. If there were no offline meetings, the Year Zero campaign would instead be considered as offering a low social integration as the campaign offered little online communication between users. It is clear that there is a difference between online and offline social integration by the fact that everyone can be part of the online social integration but the offline social integration is based on for example geographic reasons. The same applies to the rewarding factor. My Starbucks Idea has a mid level of rewarding integration because of the fact that not everyone can take part of the rewards that are offered much like how users of the Year Zero campaign could not access certain social aspects. If the rewards within My Starbucks Idea were offered online, the campaign would likely offer a high rewarding factor.

9. Conclusions

We have constructed a descriptive model, which enables companies and producers to analyze their campaign using a number of central terms. This model helps the understanding of how the mechanisms of a viral campaign works but also how one can design a viral campaign. The model as it stands now has its limitations in terms of not being able to account for all types of viral campaigns as this article has had a number of specific campaigns analyzed. As we have pointed out the different factors engaging, rewarding and social can be viewed in different

aspects, such as giving the audience the possibility of engagement but also demanding a certain level of engagement. The different aspects of the rewarding factor can be viewed as how well the audience can access the rewards in question. This translates into how well the audience can access the offline content while engaging in a campaign online. This is also true for the social factor of the model; the online user may not be able to access the offline content that is shared throughout a certain campaign by residing far away from where the reward is presented. Further analyze of the campaigns showed that no campaign ended up on offering a high rewarding factor. Is this because of the high numbers of different criteria that has to be met? Are there too many criteria listed? Are the social and engaging factors not explored thoroughly, or vice versa, does the rewarding factor need to be explored more thoroughly? This is interesting to discuss in future research and also to bear in mind that the criteria for the other factors may have to be reviewed from different points of view.

9.1 Future work

We believe that further research within this field is needed for the model to be able to cover a wider range of campaigns but also to account in greater depth the mechanisms of a viral campaign. Also the different factors in correlation to their levels may be adjusted when a thorough research is being made and different types of campaigns are being analyzed. A further development of this research may be to incorporate more campaigns both alike each other and more unique and niched. This could lead to a different kind of model first and foremost, and through this discover more mechanisms of viral campaigns and other ways of studying them. By doing this one further explore the usage of the model and decrease its limitations as it stands today and also gain a deeper knowledge of the complexity within viral marketing.

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