# RESEARCH FRONTS

A Peer Reviewed Journal of Multiple Sciences, Arts & Commerce

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

## Contents

*From the Desk of Chief Editor…*

*It is a matter of proud privilege for me to place before the Indian academia the 8$^{th}$ volume of Research Fronts (2018), one of the most regular journals in our country. Over the years, scholars from various universities have been highly appreciative of our attempt, to not only regularly publish and but also improve the quality of a research journal, being brought out from a mufassil college in a backward region. Contextually, it needs emphasis that I have succeeded in my endeavors, to a large extent, because of my alma mater, The Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Despite shockwaves created by vested interests, the university is internationally recognized for scientific vision, academic freedom, interdisciplinary research and high quality of knowledge production. The peer group formed during my formative years in CSRD/SSS/JNU, are now noted academicians in various universities of our country. Whenever I requested for quality research papers for our journal, they never disappointed me. However, this 8$^{th}$ volume was hurriedly planned and executed, hardly within three months. Consequently, I could get response only from my JNU fraternity as well as from Indore University.*

*I, therefore, take an opportunity to highlight some of the salient features of the papers including areal coverage of the contributing universities as well as the disciplines. One, this volume contains 10 articles from multiple disciplines of Geography, Economics and Business Administration. Two, the very first article, Richard Hartshorne: A Biographical Sketch and Academic Pathways is an outstanding piece of work, from the stature of a world class geographer that may encourage others to follow. Article on Cultural Studies will acquaint the readers with the emergence of a new discipline in the western world. Space and place may be considered as the raison d'être of geography. In this context, paper on Space Imagination interrogates the philosophy in a very simple language. Similarly, paper on Social Justice through Quota in India, conceptually rooted in the philosophies of social welfare provides some newer insights about it. Similarly, all other papers rooted in local/regional issues are also immersed in scientific rigour, employing appropriate methodologies and have their own great value.*

*Three*, it is a national level publication in terms of its geographical coverage of articles received from *North India* (3), *East India* (2), *West India* (2) and *Central India* (3). *Four*, the institutions involved are *Jamia Millia Islamia,* New Delhi, *ITS Engineering College*, Greater Noida, *The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda*, Vadodara, *Shivaji University,* Kolhapur, *Devi Ahilya Viswavidyalaya,* Indore, *Calcutta University,* Kolkata, and *Ravenshaw University,* Cuttack. The overall improvement in the quality of research production and geographical coverage of articles in this volume ostensibly reflect that the journal has come out of its stage of infancy, and can rightly claim its national status.

I am highly thankful to all the contributors who have sent their scholarly works for publication as well as promptly revising them according to reviewer's comments. I am extremely obliged to my friends, Shri Mumtaz Khan (New Delhi) and Prof. Gyan Prakash (Indore), for their kind help and consistent encouragement, over the years, for improving the quality of publication besides reviewing the papers and suggesting the required changes.

I am extremely thankful to our Principal Dr. R. N. Singh for his patronage, inspiration and encouragement in this noble effort. I highly appreciate the academic and moral support of my enthusiastic colleagues, Dr. Shailendra Singh and Dr. Sanjay Thiske, the editor and associate editor respectively.  I extend my special thanks to Dr. Pramod Kumar Mahish and Shri Raju Khunttey, both assistant editors, for extending their technical know-how in setting, formatting and converting the word files into pdf ones, so that we may be saved from the blunders of unprofessional printers of this small town. However, as Chief Editor of the Journal, for any lacunae, the sole responsibility lies in me. Moreover, suggestions for improvement in the quality of the journal would be highly appreciated.

*Krishna Nandan Prasad*

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

# Viral Marketing Communication: Word of Mouth to Word of Mouse

Meenu Kumar*, Shakti Prakash** and Akanksha Raman Khare***

## *Abstract*

Viral marketing is a technique of reaching customers through social media and other platforms on internet. It is like traditional word of mouth communication but assisted by internet. The use of internet makes it fast and if used properly may bring great profit with little or no expenses as most of the channels used in viral marketing are free and therefore good for those organizations which have very limited budget for promotion. The reason for great success of viral marketing is the change in customer buying behavior these days. Presently customers usually ignore the advertising message at traditional media due to its paid and hyper nature but they don't resist the message passed along by friends or other acquaintances on their social networks. The present study is theoretical and comprehensive study of viral marketing, its scope, principles, pros and cons.

**Keywords:** Internet ,Marketing, Messages, Promotion, Viral

## Introduction:

With the advent of internet, every sphere of life has witnessed sea changes and it has dramatically transformed the way of communication also. Today Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram have created their own social communities and provide users a platform to share their information and opinions. This is also offering the marketers a new avenue to reach its wide range of customers quickly, effectively and in more cost effective manner than traditional method. Customers are now aware enough and understand the gimmicks and tricks of marketers and they usually ignore the traditional advertising messages. The present study is theoretical and exploratory in nature.

_____

*Visiting Faculty, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore. e-mail- mn_kumar26@rediffmail.com

** Professor and Head MBA department , ITS Engineering College, Gr. Noida, UP.

*** EX MBA Scholar (DAV, Indore)

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Objective of the study:**

Theoretical analysis of viral marketing, its nature, principals and characteristics.

**What is Viral Marketing?**

Viral marketing is involving the customers/ users to promote products and services without their awareness. It occurs online through "posted reviews, web-based opinion platforms, boycott web sites, news groups, mail bags, discussion forums, personal e-mails, chat rooms" and other formats including blogs and social networking sites (Datta, et al., 2005, p. 73).

Hespos (2002) mentions that viral marketing "stands for a company's activities to make use of customers' communication networks to promote and distribute products."
Just like virus spreads from one person to other, the marketing messages in viral marketing are spread from one customer to other using their own social networks. It is just like word of mouth canvassing, that is if a customers were satisfied they use to communicate their friends and those friends further communicate to other friends and so on but the process was slow. The internet has enabled its customers to pass the message like wild fire by using social networks, blogs, emails etc. It has also been called as "network-enhanced word-of-mouth" (Datta, et al., 2005). Thus the root of viral marketing emulates from WOM marketing but assisted by networks.

Rebecca Larson opines "Viral marketing takes the traditional roots of word of mouth marketing and exponentially expanded the reach through social networks, blogs, and other technological mediums. Viral marketing works because friends are better at target marketing than any database" (Rebecca Larson, 2009).

Datta, et al., (2005) define viral marketing as "marketing techniques that seek to exploit pre-existing social networks to produce exponential increases in brand awareness, through processes similar to the spread of an epidemic"

Porter and Golan (2006), clarify it further states "Viral advertising is 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."  According to Justin Kirby "the idea of viral marketing is to create a buzz around the product, to make people share and talk about your advertisement, without knowing that it is an actual advertisement" (Kirby, 2006).

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Gil-Or defines Viral marketing as a phenomenon in which messages are passed from one member to another inside a network framework just like viruses (Gil-Or, 2010). Viral marketing is very useful for those starts up ventures who have limited budget as it is cost very little with very astounding result in a very short period. (Nucifora, 2000).

Azeez states (2001) 'Fundamentally, advertising and marketing budgets no longer stretch as far as they used to, and the perceived savings by going viral are too attractive to ignore.'

A very comprehensive one is given in Michael Bryce's book Viral Marketing – Potentials and Pitfalls (published in 2005):

"Viral marketing is a marketing technique that aims to exploit the network effects on the internet by offering a selected target audience an incentive relevant to their needs that encourages them to voluntarily pass on an electronic message to peers with similar interests, thereby generating growing exposure to the message".

**History of Viral Marketing:**

The first to write about viral marketing was media critic Douglas Rushkoff in his 1994 book "Media Virus." The assumption is that if such an advertisement reaches a "susceptible" user, that user will become "infected".In 1996 Jeffrey Rayport, professor of Harvard Business School wrote an article "The Virus of Marketing", where he named a new way of marketing: viral marketing or v-marketing. He asserts that virus as a "marketing program" one of the efficient ways to succeed with limited budget and time (1996).

But it was recognized with the launch of the mail site hotmail.com in 1997. Hotmail's practice was to append an advertisement of itself on each message that is sent using their service. When a recipient gets interested and clicks on the ad, it will lead to Hotmail's website for him to sign up. This will go on and on, and the growth is similar to an exponential curve. The email got a huge number of subscribers in only 18 months (Kirby and Madsen, 2006).

**Types of Viral Marketing:**

1.  **Pass-along viral marketing**

This is the crudest form of viral marketing in which message at the bottom of e-mail. This type of viral marketing encourages the user to pass the message to others but it may

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

have a risk to be treated as a spam by e-mail providers and therefore it is essential that marketing message should not contain any word that may be tagged as spam.

### 2. Incentivized viral marketing

This is a type of referral marketing technique in which marketers offer rewards to users when they refer somebody to the company. However this technique is effective when the referred person need to take action in lieu of the reward to be given.

### 3. Undercover Viral marketing

As the name suggest, in this type of technique message is in disguised form as an unusual page, piece of news etc. Apparently readers do not understand that something is being marketed to them or the message is from marketer side and they pass the message to others.

### 4. Edgy Gossip/Buzz marketing

In this type of viral marketing marketers try to draw the attention of the public by creating some controversies/ publicities that lead gossip or discussion among public and the message is spread from one corner of world to other.

### 5. User-Managed Database

This is an organized form of viral marketing in which users themselves create and manage their own list of contacts through a database obtain by an online service provider.


**How Viral Marketing works:**

Viral marketing is based on traditional word of mouth communication-WOM, but the advent of internet has enhanced the power of WOM multiple times resulting more purchase because it generates advocacy.

In viral marketing, the message can be forwarded to millions of people at one click of mouse, and that's why some marketing expert also call it as word of mouse marketing. In simple term it is referral marketing.

The reason for success of viral marketing lies in the change of consumer's behavior who disbelieve one sided promotional campaign/ advertising one for all by marketers. They are now aware that advertising is paid form of promotion and marketers usually put their products or services in finest and convincing manner. "People are more skeptical if someone is paid to speak about a product. (Dobele, Toleman & Beverland, 2005).

Today consumer's buying decisions are influenced by positive reviews on social media and they seek advice of their friends, colleagues or peer members. And here the

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

viral marketing works as the message is forwarded by only these members. Rebecca Larson also opines "Viral marketing works because friends are better at target marketing than any database" (Rebacca Larson, 2009). And that's why many businesses are embracing viral marketing to persuade their customers. Tedesco also asserts "More and more business is going to transact via Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and other applications yet to be developed cautioning that this movement is too important to not be included in a corporate marketing and communications strategy. Social media is essentially a new format of word- of-mouth marketing" (Tedesco, 2009)

For success of viral marketing, the message should be attractive and can be easily passes along. Although as Bazadona opined, it is not easy to create a successful viral message; if it is succeeded one can get a big success from a small investment (Bazadona, 2000).

Daniels (2001) states that marketing message should be interesting enough so that people may want to spread it and it is the greatest challenge before marketers. (Daniels,j,2001). Another expert of viral marketing, David Meerman Scott,  from the Wall Street Journal, suggests that viral message must have interesting web content, preferably free, funny, unique, and creative and if having  would be an advantage.  He further states that marketer should also have a group of people to start sharing viral marketing message with all the links. (David Meerman Scott, 2010)

Rasmusson (2000) reveals that three things are required for successful viral marketing which are -the nature of the company's industry; the on-line tenure of the audience; and the topic of the message. Viral marketing will be successful only when benefit of receiving a viral message is great enough than the cost of passing along it. (Fadhley, 2000)

Ward warns that marketer can create a message which can be passed along, but seeding-(initiating)  the message and what will happen afterward that is how the message is spread is not known.( Ward, E. 2000). Skrob also states "The Company influences the message just in the beginning of the campaign, then when the virus is taking over the companies holds little control over to who the message is being spread to" (Skrob, 2005).

However the success of viral message also depends on to whom the message has been targeted. In viral marketing, it is essential to target the right group and seeding the initial message through careful selection.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Roeger in his book "Diffusion of Innovations" has categorized the population in five groups –Innovators, early adopters, majority, late majority and laggards and experts suggest that marketers should target their viral message to early adopters who constitutes 13% of population but are more likely to adopt new and innovative products / services, ready to take risk and likely to give reviews and majority of population follow after going through their reviews. Early adopters can play a significant role in diffusion process of viral marketing and the marketers should target them (Roger, E. M,2003).

Another categorization of people was made by Malcolm Gladwell in his book 'the Tipping Point – How little things can make a big difference', published in 2000. Out of three laws given by Gladwell, In  The Law of the Few Gladwell states, "The success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular […] set of social gifts". Further Gladwell, states that this is the "80/20 Principle in economists: in any situation roughly 80 percent of the 'work' will be done by 20 percent of the participants.

Malcolm Gladwell describes people   as

1. Connectors: connectors are those people who have large number of acquaintance across an array of social, professional, cultural, and economic circles and are in the habit of making introductions. They 'are a handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack (…) for making friends and acquaintances'

2. Mavens: These are "information specialists", or "people we rely upon to connect us with new information". They collect knowledge, from the marketplace, and share it with others. Gladwell suggest that the Maven starts "word-of-mouth epidemics" as they have knowledge and communication skill.

3. Salesmen are good "persuaders", or negotiators. These three are called as agent of changes by Gladwell.

De Valck et al., (2009), researched different types of community members so that the viral marketing campaigns may be focused to the right target groups. According to researchers there exist six different types of member:

1. The core member who are frequent visitors of website approximately five to six times a week for an hour, or daily for about an hour and a half. They visit, browse, retrieve supply and discuss information expertise. Educationally they are low but good social connections.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

2.  The Conversationalists are the members who visit the website 3-4 times a week for about half an hour and to discuss information. They are  mature member and are socially involved

3.  The Informationalists also visit the website 3-4 times a week for about half an hour to retrieve and give out information. They are also socially involved and mature members.

4.  The Hobbyists are also socially involved but educational level is relatively low. Their focuses are personal web pages, guest books and profiles.

5.  The Functionalists visit the website for half an hour once a week to retrieve information. They are not social but have the highest education level.

6.  The Opportunists are the people who visit the website less than once a week for about 15 minutes to retrieve information. They are also not socially involved in the community.

There may beers who are  other types of categorization of the community members/population but the marketers who are going to create message for viral marketing, should know well in advance who may be targeted to diffuse /spread the message as the target group may be different according to products/ services.

Keller and Berry sum it up in a good way: "To succeed today, you need to connect with people who are at the center of the conversation… Specifically, you should make sure you are reaching the decision makers who are influential in others' decisions. Influentials are well connected; they have ties to a significantly larger number of groups than the average American" (Kiss & Bichler, 2008, p. 234).

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson (2000), the editor of 'Web Marketing today' suggests six simple principles to follow for effective viral marketing strategy:

1.  Viral message may generate great interest and accomplish its goal to spread fastly if it provides free product or services. According to Wilson 'free' attracts more attention.

2.  The message should be designed in such a manner that it may be transferred to others effortlessly and without degradation.

3.  Viral message will be successful if it spreads like wild fire and therefore it is important the transmission method must be rapidly scalable from small to large.

4.  Viral marketers should understand human motivations and behaviors and should take the advantage by creating messages accordingly.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

5. From time immemorial, people use their own  networks of human interaction and exchange social values and plans for  the well-being of the individual of community In digital era also people have develop their own social network  and marketers must be able to identify and exploit these networks today . Marketers must learn to place messages within the communications that exist between people, because people in digital environments also develop network spread their messages.

6. Wilson suggests to use others   articles or resources to make your message more reliable.

Every coin has two sides and viral marketing is also not free of risks. The unsolicited email messages intended to be viral send by marketers may be treated as spam. The suggested way to make message viral is to make it funny, creative and interesting but perceptions of people are different and what may be funny for one may be boring for others. Further the viral message may be planned and seed (initiate) by marketers but once it spreads marketers has no control over it as where it is passed along and to what extent and in which way. Sometimes it brings reverse effect and cause negative publicity of products and services. These are the challenges for the marketers which have to be dealt wisely by marketers.

**Conclusions:**

Viral marketing is transforming the traditional efforts of advertising through word of mouth to word of mouse. As it is through internet, it is fast, inexpensive and has more potential to attract customers because of referral effect. The advertising is always viewed by customers with distrust as it  is paid but the reference by third party like peer group, friends and friends at social sites makes the message more trustworthy and this is the main reason of viral message success. And therefore marketers have a lot of hope with this new technique of marketing communication. However this technique is also not flawless. There are certain instances when viral messages failed to capture the attention of customers or it attained negative impetus. And therefore great attention has to be paid while designing the seed-the viral message and required to be targeted the right group of people.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

## References

1. **Azeez, W.** (2001) **"**Will viral marketing become an epidemic?" *New Media Age*. [Online].

   Available WWW: http://www.infotrac.london.galegroup.com.

2. **Bazadona, D.** (2000) "Getting viral" [Online]. Available from:

   http://www.clickz.com/clickz/column/1705927/getting-viral

3. **Bryce,Michael.**(2005) "Viral Marketing – Potentials and Pitfalls", *Saarbrücken* : VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.

4. **Daniels, J**. (2001) "Viral marketing: how to achieve your objectives", *Marketing Mix* 19(6): 12.

5. **Datta, P**., **Chowdhury, D., & Chakraborty, B.** (2005) "Viral marketing: New form of word of-mouth through internet" [Electronic version], *The Business Review*, Cambridge, 3(2), 69-75.

6. **De Valck, K., van Bruggen, G., Wierenga, B.,** (2009) "Virtual Communities: A marketing perspective", *Decision support systems*, 47, pp. 185-203

7. **Dobele, A., Toleman, D., & Beverland, M.** (2005)  "Controlled infection! Spreading the brand message through viral marketing", *Business Horizons*, 48(2), 143-149.

8. **Fadhley, S.** (2000) "Viral marketing well set for a bright future",  *Precision Marketing* 4 12 (49):15. [Online].  Available  at www: http://www.infotrac.london.galegroup.com

9. **Gil-Or, O.** (2010) "Building consumer demand by using viral marketing tactics within an online social network" , *Advances in Management*, Vol 3(7) ,pp7-14

10. **Gladwell, M.** (2000) "The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference", *Little*, Brown and Company, New York.

11. **Hespos, T.** (2002) "BMW Films: The Ultimate Marketing Scheme", blog

12. **Keller, K.L**., (1993) "Conceptualizing, Measuring and Managing customer based equity", *Journal of Marketing*, 57, Jan 1993, pp.1-22

13. **Kirby, J. and Marsden, P.** (2006) "Connected Marketing -The Viral, Buzz and word of mouth revolution". *Elsevier* 1st edition. Oxford

14. **Kiss, C., Bichler, M.** (2008) "Identification of influencers — Measuring influence in customer networks", *Decision Support Systems*, 46, pp. 233-253.

15. **Larson, R** (2009) "The rise of viral marketing through the new media of social media", *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. North Central University

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

16. **Meerman Scott, D**. (2013)  *The new rules of Marketing and PR: how to use social media, online video, mobile applications, blogs, news releases, and viral marketing to reach buyers directly*, *Fourth edition*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc

17. **Nucifora, A.** (2000) "Find success with free 'word -of-net' marketing", *Orlando Business Journal*  17(4):27. [Online].

18. **Porter, L. & Golan, G.J.** (2006)  "From subservient chickens to brawny men: a comparison of viral advertising to television advertising", *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 6(2), pp. 30- 38.

19. **Rasmusson, E.** (2000) "Viral marketing: healthier than it sounds", *Sales and Marketing Management* 152(6):18. [Online]

20. **Rayport, J.** (1996) *The Virus of Marketing*. Fast Company

21. **Roger, E. M.** (2003) "Diffusion of Innovations", Free Press, New York 2003

22. **Skrob, J.** (2005) "Open source and viral marketing" [Online]. Available at: http://tuga.at/uploads/media/paper50.pdf

23. **Tedesco, T.** (2009) "Demystifying payback of social media and other marketing efforts"

24. **Ward, E**. (2000), "Viral marketing involves serendipity, not planning", *B to B*, Vol. 85:26.

25. **Wilson R. F**. (2005). "The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing. Web Marketing Today. (70):1–4. Available at www: http://www.jrlenterprises.com/viral-marketing.htm

**\*\*\***