

Viral Marketing: Innovative Strategies and Modern Approaches

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Abstract: Viral marketing has become a crucial aspect of modern digital advertising, leveraging social media and other online platforms to rapidly spread promotional content. This paper explores the origins, strategies, tools, advantages, and limitations of viral marketing, highlighting its impact on brand awareness and consumer behavior. By examining historical case studies and contemporary trends, the study provides insights into the effectiveness of viral marketing as a cost-efficient and engaging promotional method.

Keywords: Viral marketing, digital advertising, consumer behavior, social media, brand awareness.



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Introduction

The emergence of viral marketing in the late 1990s revolutionized the advertising industry. Initially considered an unconventional marketing technique, it has evolved into a dominant strategy for promoting products and services through online platforms. Viral marketing capitalizes on user participation and word-of-mouth communication to enhance brand visibility. This paper examines the concept, tools, and effectiveness of viral marketing, shedding light on its advantages and drawbacks.

Viral marketing

The term "viral marketing" emerged in the late 1990s. It gained popularity mainly due to the promotion of products and services through the Internet and electronic communications. The concept of viral marketing is based on spreading information about a product or service in unconventional ways. Initially, viral marketing was considered just another advertising method. However, over time, its concept and approaches have evolved significantly (MyGribs, n.d.).

The term "viral marketing" was introduced in 1996 by Professor Jeffrey Rayport. He was among the first scholars to use this phrase, defining it as advertising that spreads like a virus, transmitted from one person to another (Kostareva & Starkova, 2013). Viral marketing is a process that involves influencing a target audience by selling various goods and services through the voluntary participation of that audience in spreading viral information about a product. (Utakaeva, 2020)

Several researchers have studied viral marketing, offering various definitions. For example, A. Kostareva and N. Starkova define viral marketing as a method of conducting advertising campaigns where the consumer acts as a source of information about a product, brand, company, or other promoted entity (Il'icheva, 2012).

Main part

Researcher I. Utakayeva highlights the unique features of applying viral marketing on social networks: "In an era of intense information and advertising flow, attracting consumer attention with creativity and appeal is a complex task for any company. Today, consumers tend to check product reviews, follow various websites, compare, and evaluate before making a purchase. That is why competent marketers incorporate the 'leave a review' function when developing online stores, facilitating better sales and purchases." (Utakaeva, 2020)

Viral marketing tools

- **Video:** A classic example is the Old Spice advertisement featuring actor Terry Crews, who performed humorous antics in various commercials. This unconventional approach turned the video into a viral sensation, garnering millions of views.
- **Audio:** An example of viral audio content is the advertisement for quick loans by "Home Money," featuring the slogan "It's better to call 8-800-555-35-35 than to borrow money from someone else." This phrase became widely popular.
- **Images:** Marketers frequently use viral images in advertising campaigns. A notable example is Reebok's #NoFrames campaign, which generated significant buzz.
- **Text:** A famous example includes the humorous Facebook post about Area 51, which falsely claimed that aliens were hidden there.
- **Apps:** Certain mobile applications can go viral. For instance, TikTok encourages users to create dance videos or engage in other trends, making it a widely recognized viral app. (Uchevatkin & Smirnov, 2020).

Today, global internet users encounter viral content through various tools. This is particularly evident on social media, where videos, audio messages, images, and text-based content spread rapidly. However, this phenomenon also leads to security concerns, such as account breaches and unauthorized dissemination of personal data belonging to individuals, companies, and organizations.

Types of viral marketing:

- **Pass-along:** Users voluntarily share advertising messages (e.g., the viral "Gangnam Style" video by PSY).
- **Incentivized viral marketing:** Users receive rewards for taking specific actions, such as subscribing to a group or sharing a post to enter a contest for a smartphone.
- **Undercover marketing:** This technique involves subtly promoting a product or service through hidden advertising. For example, Google launched its social network Google+ with an invitation-only registration system, creating exclusivity and increasing public interest.
- **Buzz marketing:** This method aims to generate public attention at any cost, sometimes even through negative means. An example is the historical promotion of the Shustov brand. (Chekhovskaya & Ivanova, 2015).

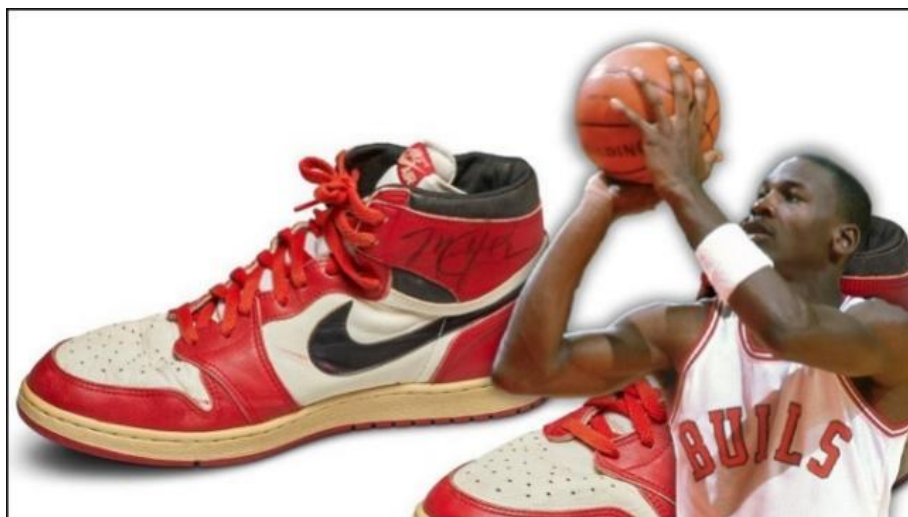


Figure 1 (Concepto, n.d.) first air jordans | Concepto | Dressing Cuisine Bain

One of the earliest and most well-known cases of viral marketing was Hotmail's 1996 campaign. The email service included a simple yet effective message at the end of every email: "Get your free Hotmail account!" This strategy quickly attracted millions of users.

Another prominent example is Nike's early 1980s campaign for Air Jordan sneakers. The marketing linked Michael Jordan's on-court success to the shoes, encouraging fans to emulate him, leading to widespread popularity.

The role of social media in viral marketing. Since 2020, online shopping has become significantly more popular. Many consumers now prefer to purchase products through online stores, which use social media platforms like Telegram and Instagram to promote their offerings. The "leave a review" function allows sellers to gather valuable customer insights and improve their services.

Social media not only serves as an effective tool for shaping public opinion but also facilitates open communication among users. However, it has also become the primary channel for viral content dissemination. The traditional models of viral spread no longer fully account for modern viral marketing technologies and the unique characteristics of social networks (Utakaeva, 2020).

On social media, viral marketing follows a specific life cycle. If content does not become viral within three days of publication, it is unlikely to achieve virality. Additionally, viral marketing can disrupt social media platforms, websites, chatrooms, forums, and digital media through various viral tactics (Markeeva, 2011).

Several reasons contribute to the popularity of viral advertising:

1. **Cost** – Viral advertising is usually cheaper compared to traditional advertising.
2. **Perceived Positivity** – In most cases, viral content is entertaining by nature, so people do not see it as unnecessary or boring but rather as something engaging and interesting.
3. **Regulatory Flexibility** – Since viral marketing is often not classified as traditional advertising, it can sometimes bypass certain restrictions and limitations.
4. **Long-Term Impact** – In modern trends, this type of advertising can last for two to three years, or even longer in some cases.

There are four main reasons to use viral marketing methods for advertising on the Internet (Nogotkova, n.d.):

1. **Requires no constant investment and pays for itself** – Unlike targeted ads on social media or contextual advertising on the Internet, which only work as long as the budget lasts, viral marketing continues spreading on its own. Since it is easier to fund, it brings more profit.
2. **Generates interest** – Viral marketing is not perceived as a traditional advertisement but rather as engaging and valuable information.
3. **Leaves a long-lasting impact** – While marketing viruses typically have a short lifespan, their influence can last for 2–3 years.
4. **Builds trust** – If a marketer successfully launches a viral campaign, users will start sharing the content with their friends and acquaintances on their own initiative.

Viral marketing techniques typically evoke genuine emotions in users (such as laughter, surprise, or amazement), making people feel directly connected to the advertisement.

Forms of Viral Advertising:

- ✓ Videos
- ✓ Images
- ✓ Audio Recordings
- ✓ Flash Applications
- ✓ Text-based Content

Advantages of viral marketing. According to researchers O.A. Lebedeva and A. Tulinac (2015), viral marketing offers several benefits:

- **Cost-effectiveness:** Unlike television ads, viral campaigns require minimal investment beyond content creation.
- **Consumer engagement:** Viral content resonates with audiences by appealing to their emotions, such as humor, surprise, or curiosity.
- **Flexibility:** Unlike television advertisements that air at specific times, viral content can be accessed and shared at any moment.
- **Artistic value:** Some viral advertisements are recognized as creative works and are even featured at advertising festivals.

Disadvantages of viral marketing. A. Krivoshein, (n.d.)co-founder of the "Tochno" agency, identifies the key drawbacks of viral marketing:

- **Lack of control:** Once viral content spreads, it can become unpredictable and may even work against the brand.
- **Limited impact on business strategy:** Viral content often does not provide substantial information about the product, brand principles, or pricing.
- **Sustained audience interest is required:** Viral marketing requires continuous efforts to maintain audience engagement.

Assessing the effectiveness of viral marketing. Despite these drawbacks, viral marketing campaigns can be evaluated using key performance indicators such as:

- ✓ **Awareness:** Measures how many people remember the viral content.
- ✓ **Retention:** Evaluates how easily users can recall and understand the message.
- ✓ **Recognition:** Determines the percentage of users who recall a brand's details.

- ✓ **Brand mentions:** Assesses the frequency of brand-related discussions compared to competitors.
- ✓ **Brand impact:** Indicates the percentage of positive brand mentions.
- ✓ **Sentiment analysis:** Identifies the ratio of negative and neutral mentions.

From these insights, it is clear that viral marketing plays a crucial role in increasing brand awareness and recognition. (MyGribs, n.d.)

Conclusion

In summary, viral marketing is a marketing strategy designed to quickly spread products or services through user-generated sharing. Social media platforms have become major distribution channels for viral content, including videos, images, and messages. While early viral marketing examples have evolved, they continue to attract audiences in new formats. Despite its drawbacks, viral marketing remains a powerful tool that influences consumer behavior and brand perception.

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