

PANDEMIC STRATEGY. EFFECTIVE COMBINATION OF VIRAL MARKETING AND TARGETING?

ARTUR MODLIŃSKI

Abstract: Successful management of viral marketing in the area of targeting is disputable. Viral form of marketing allow to reduce cost but selection of ideal market segment is difficult as far as viral cannot be fully controlled by managers. In the article the naturalistic model of virus transmission is confronting with the consequences of unserious targeting and selecting of target audience. There is presenting in the paper that imitating the virus transmission and its adaptation into the field of marketing can result in the lack of control over campaign. Analyzing the steps of viral marketing campaign helps to detect which of them should be boost to increase the control over the promotion process. The proper media willingly used by particular segment can be chosen for viral marketing but it is not sufficient enough for effective process management. Hence, intelligent planning of viral marketing launch is essence for final success of the campaign. Pandemic strategy is described with the use of case study of ice cream company which launched the free product in Polish spa where majority of holidaymakers was the target segment of the company. The purpose of the article is to present the scientific polemics if viral marketing and targeting can be effectively controlled by managers?

Keywords: marketing, brand, customer, experiment, relationship

JEL Classification: M30, M31, M37

1. INTRODUCTION

Viral marketing as relatively new method of promotion and communication is constantly analyzing and developing by marketing theorists and practitioners. The essential purpose of such examination is to identify disadvantages which restrict the scope of viral marketing. Marketing campaign which is using the viral methods learn from naturalistic sources of knowledge which can be applicable into social science. In this particular phenomena, marketers are imitating the mode of action which in the natural environment is characteristic for virus transmission [1].

The essence of the viral marketing method is an assumption that by means of naturalistic concept of virus transmission it will be possible to attain similar goals – ‘to infect’ potentially highest number of people. In the case of virus transmission, infection is necessary for virus itself to survive. The survival is, whereas, the overriding objective of each organism living on Earth. In turn, in the case of viral marketing the overarching goal is to send the given information to possible highest number of people which are constituting the audience for the company. From the point of view of naturalistic concept, the primary objective of each company is also to outlast, grow and develop. Therefore, the assumption of virus transmission and viral marketing are synonymous. The major difference is, however, that virus infection helps to provide the survival of virus itself while viral marketing should not be used to provide the survival of sending information but for the company which has sent it. Thus, the subjects of survival are differing. Hence, this confusion in the subjects can result in misapprehension of mechanisms which should ensure the survival. Imitating the virus transmission and correlating it with marketing, from the logical and naturalistic point of view, can provide not the survival of company but, most of all, information which was sent by this company. It should

not be perceived as negative phenomenon as far as information is warrantor for company. On the other hand, the marketers should be aware that the design of communication and promotion with the use of viral marketing is not operating on the same principles.

In the natural environment, virus is not planning the infection. Its generic objective is to spread in the purest way. There is no phenomenon of conscious selection of the victim. Each weak entity is potential subject of infection. In the marketing field, this principle was likewise adapted. In majority of viral marketing campaigns the overriding objective is to hand on the information to highest number of general audience. Marketers have limited possibility to transfer their viral information in conscious, planned way. They are sending the information and hope that each person which get it, will hand it on. Therefore, it can be seen that marketers are under high risk of losing control over the sent by them information, especially on the primary stage of campaign. It is obvious that lack of control over any marketing action is highly undesirable phenomena [2].

The objective of the article is to analyze the steps of the process of formation of viral marketing campaign and to asses in which of them marketers can increase their control over the process. Such analysis will contribute to final suggestion which methods can be used to boost the conscious targeting and to limit the cost of the campaign. Conscious targeting will be milestone for successful campaign with the use of viral marketing as far as such campaign will not only rely on naturalistic concept of virus transmission but it will also contain conscious selecting process of target consumers. For this reason, proposing in the article ‘Pandemic strategy’ will be a combination of natural practice and intelligent planning which will help to limit the risk and cost of marketing campaign.

2. SCIENTIFIC AIM

Under the assumption that campaign is preparing with the use of viral marketing from the point of view of naturalistic concept, the holistic process is consisting of three steps: projecting, launching and distributing of information or promotion. It should be emphasized that in this approach such process is opened – it is not defined where or when the campaign is finished.

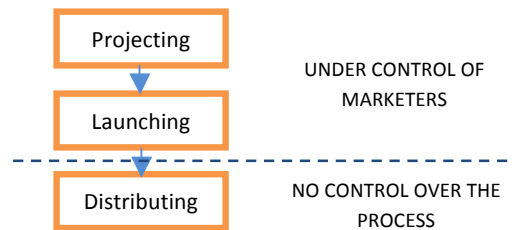


Figure 1 The process of viral marketing campaign in naturalistic approach

Source: Own elaboration

Projecting is perceived as initial stage of viral marketing campaign. At this point managers are defining the objectives of their task. There is strictly defining the shape of 'virus' and channel in which it will be distributing. This stage demands creativity and orientation in technology. Such combination helps to adjust the campaign into the attitudes and behaviour of target audience. Main problem at this stage in naturalistic approach is triggered because of the accumulation of skills and abilities which must be combined simultaneously. Creative teams must cooperate with technical minds what can lead to misunderstandings and conflict in the team. This in turn can be the main cause of the most serious problem at projecting stage – omission of proper targeting and maladjustment of tools, media and form of communication into selected segment of consumers. Creating the viral information is not key point at this stage as far as this information must be, first of all, readable by target audience. Managers must be aware of attitudes, habits and behaviour of their customers. It seems to be polemical question if the viral marketing real objective is to reach as high number of people as possible. It would be rather much more profitable if viral information would have reached as high number of company's customers as it can. Is it necessary for the message to be reached by everybody or proper projection can facilitate more conscious selecting, attracting and keeping the customers [3]?

Launching the viral message is the second stage in the process of viral marketing campaign preparation. It is assumed that at this point the whole campaign is planned and the main of the objective is to send the first "wave" of message to the audience. The hope of managers is that after this stage people who got the viral information will be under such impression that they will redistributing the message into their acquaintances and that they will be infected with the general idea what will contribute to the fulfilment of presumed expectations (increase in sale, higher rate of brand recognition, finding out about new offer of the company). If launching is taking place in the internet, marketers must precisely select the media which will serve as initial tool in running the campaign. Improper selection can result in the fact that too small number of people will get the information, they will be not the target segment of

the company or even if the viral message is well-prepared, the further stage of distributing the message will last longer because the proliferation has started in the inadequate "place". Another polemical question is if at the launching stage conscious selection of place is possible and how marketers can decide about pandemic source [4]?

Distributing as the third and last stage in the process of viral marketing campaign is underestimated by majority of marketers. There is a perception that message should be distribute by audience and marketers have no influence on the results of such action. This can serve as the example of admission from the marketers that they have no control over this stage of viral campaign. However, this is an erroneous assumption. By means of combining the multitude of "deepening tools" marketers can shape the final results of viral campaign even at this stage [5] what will be presented with the case study of ice cream band "Cactus". From the holistic point of view, distributing is the weakest link in the process as far as marketers are unaware that they can use additional incentives to strengthen their activities. It is justified to suspect that viral marketing is more profitable if it is simultaneously campaigning with other tools and models.

The process of viral marketing campaign in naturalistic approach is limiting the perspective of managers. Its use triggers conviction that campaign cannot be condoled by marketers in the long perspective. The points which are especially offer neglecting are proper targeting, improper selection of information carrier and unconsciousness of expectations of target segment of consumers [6].

In view of such critique it seems to be necessary to develop the process of viral marketing campaign in such way to regain the control over the action and visualize the marketers that they have influence on the message at each step of the campaign. It is necessary to propose the tools which could be used by marketers to strengthen the campaign at each stage of the process [7]. Upon described advantages and disadvantages of naturalistic approach to viral marketing, it should be presented the extended model taking into account the solution to presented previously allegation. Such extended model of viral marketing campaign has been named "Pandemic strategy".

3. FINDINGS

The model of effective viral campaign should be developed in such way to extend the managerial control into each step of the campaign. To facilitate the process of viral preparation and to make it more transparent, it seems reasonable to divide the three steps of naturalistic approach into six interrelated components:

1. Planning (initial stage of extended model)
2. Projecting (present in naturalistic approach)
3. Launching (present in naturalistic approach)
4. Distributing (present in naturalistic approach)
5. Redistributing (missing in naturalistic approach)
6. Consolidation (missing in naturalistic approach, final stage of extended model)

The extended model of viral marketing campaign was called Pandemic strategy to accentuate that the objective of the action is not only to send a message which will be distributed by audience and waiting for the results. Such

Pandemic Strategy. Effective Combination of Viral Marketing and Targeting?

approach has indicated that the process is temporary and impermanent. The goal of Pandemic strategy is to arouse the interest and maintain this state with the use of auxiliary tools which can be used at each stage of the campaign. Hence, from the assumption Pandemic strategy is more permanent than model of naturalistic approach.

At the planning stage marketers must understand the objectives of their action. They should know what are the goals of the campaign, what will be promoting and what are advantages and disadvantages of given product, brand, service etc. On the other hand they have to decide which market segment is target one. It cannot be overlooked the identification of competitors and scope of their presence. Understanding the habits of target segment is essence of planning stage as far as Pandemic strategy is strictly connected to geographical targeting. Launching the viral message cannot start in random place. Choosing a proper location is key point for successful campaign prepared on the basis of Pandemic strategy. Hence, the most frequently used auxiliary tool at planning stage should be marketing research to determine where and when is occurring the highest intensity of members of particular target segment. It may be considered both media (virtual world) and geographical location (real world).

At the stage of projecting marketers must prepare the final version of viral message. The auxiliary tools which are used frequently are applications which help to create the readable information carrier. When planning and projecting stage are completed, crucial step of the Pandemic campaign can occur. Polish ice cream company Cactus decided to launch the campaign in one of Polish spa where many target customers of the brand (20-40 years old, with children, salaries on the national average) were spending summer holidays. This place was the epicentre of the brand pandemic. Other brands which are using Pandemic strategy should select the places where epicentre can occur and there is not objection that only one epicentre can take place. It is worth underlying that launching stage is short and it means only the moment when campaign starts. The process of developing the viral campaign is taking place at distributing stage. The originator of pandemic campaign of Cactus brand had decided to distribute the free samples of ice cream on the streets of spa. It has resulted in gaining potentially high number of target customers who were

fascinated with the fact that they had a chance to eat free ice cream on a hot day. The selection of time and location in this case was ideal. Unfortunately the marketers have forgotten about creating the databases with customers who have tasted their products and about introducing the customer loyalty programs what would help to pass on the message about the brand to other customers. For this reason, they were not able to identify precisely their place of residence what should be crucial at another stage of Pandemic strategy – redistributing.

The interviews with customers of Cactus brand indicate unambiguously that the marketers have projected in details such stages as: planning, projecting, launching and distributing. However, Pandemic strategy crucial points are also redistributing and consolidation. In case of Cactus brand, they were not taken into account and customers who were impressed because of free samples delivered at the distributing stage, felt disappointed when they came back to their home cities and product was not available there.

Redistributing stage in the Pandemic strategy serve as reinforcement for the viral campaign. At this point, when marketers have data about customers who were involved into former stages of campaign, it should be reminded about the product in places of residence of target segment. Redistributing stage uses the tools of traditional ATL campaign but only in places where intensity of customers from constructed database is the highest. It helps to avoid the unnecessary costs connected to numerous posters and broadcasting time. Additionally, the intensification of the campaign in particular geographical area will contribute to the increase of new customers and further spread of the viral message. Consolidation stage is last one in the Pandemic strategy. The objective is to facilitate the availability of the product through Internet and in traditional shops. If such stage is not planned, it can lead even to the failure of the whole viral campaign as far as customers have no access to the products and they forget about its existence. The customers of Cactus have pointed out in the interviews that flavour and idea of the brand were interesting but after one free tasting, they were not able to buy the product at home. As far as they were not knowing the brand perfectly, they gave up to search it intensively.

Table 1 The extended model of viral marketing campaign – Pandemic strategy

STAGE	MAIN OBJECTIVES	AUXILIARY TOOLS
<i>Planning</i>	- to choose target segment and understand the habits of its members; - to examine where and when the target segments' members are meeting.	Marketing research
<i>Projecting</i>	- to construct the viral message which will be attractive for target segment of customers.	Applications
<i>Launching</i>	- to launch the message in geographical or virtual place where target segment members' intensity is potentially the highest.	Short-term monitoring tools
<i>Distributing</i>	- to distribute the message to highest number of target segment members in the place of launch; - to gain information about people who got the message; - to encourage the potential customers to pass on the viral message to the similar customers.	Databases, free samples, testers, customer loyalty programs.
<i>Redistributing</i>	- to remind the target segment about the message in their place of residence; - to intensify the transfer of the message; - to increase the number of customers.	ATL (TV, radio, Internet, posters, outdoor, indoor, etc.)
<i>Consolidation</i>	- to keep new customer.	Distribution monitoring, Internet shop.

Source: Own elaboration

4. DISCUSSIONS

Crucial point in the divagations about Pandemic strategy is a question if the fulfilment of the described conditions guarantees the success of each campaign. In the research only customers of food brand were interviewed. As far as in the campaign of Cactus two last stages were not planned, it is impossible to assess or forecast if complete Pandemic strategy in this case would be successful. Such strategy is rather a model, which gives suggestion, what marketers should not forget in viral marketing campaign. Moreover, not each brand is able to provide free samples. At the distributing stage is discussable if customers will be eager to declare real address. The probability that addresses will be false increases the likelihood that also databases will be incorrect. In such occurrence redistributing and consolidation stages will be mismatched what can result in the inefficiency of the campaign.

5. CONCLUSION

Pandemic strategy proposed upon observation of viral marketing campaigns and interviews with customers helps to increase the control over each stage of the campaign and probability of targeting's success. Taking into account the naturalistic approach and expanding it with the aspects of traditional marketing tools provides the complex recommendations for marketers willing to involve into viral marketing. Pandemic strategy is challenge for companies because of necessity of combining traditional tools and innovative technology. On the other hand, such new marketing tools are worth being considered as far as they are not used commonly by competitors. Free samples and loyalty programs are particularly welcomed by contemporary customers who are bored with traditional TV campaigns. New customers are more demanding and, therefore, Pandemic strategy can be a key to gain and keep them around the brand.

REFERENCES

- [1] MORGAN, G. 1997. *Obrazy organizacji*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, a. s., 1997. 489 s. ISBN 978-83-01-15463-9.
- [2] HANLEY, P.R, LEVINSON, J.C. 2005. *Guerilla marketing- mente, persuasion, mercato*. Roma: Castelvechi, 2005. 231 s. ISBN 978-88-7615-206-1.
- [3] NELSON-FIELD, K. 2013. *Viral Marketing: The Science of Sharing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 128 s. ISBN 978-0195527988.
- [4] BERGER, J. 2013. *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013. 256 s. ISBN 978-1451686579.
- [5] SERNOVITZ, A., KAWASAKI, G., GODIN S. 2012. *Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking*. Austin: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2012. 240 s. ISBN 978-1608323661.
- [6] ADAMS, R.L. 2013. *Viral: How to Spread your Ideas like a Virus*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013. 118 s. ISBN 978-1484951996.
- [7] SCOTT, D.M. 2010. *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to Use Social Media, Blogs, News Releases, Online Video, and Viral Marketing to Reach Buyers Directly*. New Jersey: John Wiley, 2010. 289 s. ISBN 978-0470547816.

Artur MODLINSKI, (MA)

University of Lodz, Department of International Marketing and Retailing
 Ul. Narutowicza 59a, 90-131 Łódź, Poland
 e-mail: modlinski@uni.lodz.pl