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Virality in social media: the SPIN Framework

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This paper begins by providing foundational descriptions of the social media environment and viral marketing, including relevant examples from current public policy events. Then, proposed is a conceptual model of virality in social media, induced from analysis of successful viral marketing campaigns. The SPIN Framework suggests four key success factors for viral campaigns: spreadability, propagativity, integration and nexus. Finally, both theoretical and actionable implications for scholars and public policy makers alike are discussed. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Members of the scientific and medical communities dedicate their time and resources to wage war against viral infection and fight relentlessly to stop the spread of viruses around the globe. We marketers, however, appear to be running in the opposite direction. We dedicate our time and resources not on how to stop the spread of viral infection but rather to the systematic analysis of how to *create* and *encourage* it. In today's digitally magnified world of advertising, having a campaign 'go viral' is indeed one of the highest levels of achievement a marketer can attain.

No, our scientific friends, we haven't gone mad (at least for the purposes of this paper). What we marketers have discovered, perhaps, is the antidote to our ailment of having the advertising world we analyzed and theorized for the last century falling away from us in these times of a changing global economy, warp speed communications and consumers who thirst for knowledge and—dare I say it—transparency and truth.

The new communications world we live in is one of social media. Gone are the days when our brands could be tightly controlled and monitored, our messaging could be imposed upon our target markets and our relationships with our consumers could remain discrete affairs. The rise of social media has led to the ability for our consumers to create our messaging with or without us. Because of network

effects and instantaneous connectivity, it has thrown gasoline on the fires of word of mouth.

In an attempt to better understand virality in social media, I follow in the footsteps of our biologically inclined peers and dissect the genetic makeup of these 'viruses' into their component parts. This paper begins by briefly exploring the rise of social media and viral marketing, with implications for public policy makers both positive and negative. I then present the case of Old Spice's recent marketing campaign as an archetype of 'going viral', harnessing the potential of social media to revitalize a dying brand. Finally, I propose a conceptual framework for deconstructing and understanding these components of virality in social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are now as influential as, and perhaps in some cases more so than, conventional or traditional media. In many ways, social media have not only changed the way in which organizations and their brands interact with consumers, they have also changed the way business gets done. Organizations now are not only able to reach out and speak to customers anywhere at any time but also able to interact with consumers and join their conversations. Organizations are increasingly attempting to utilize social media to reach existing customers, gain new ones and build or maintain credibility and reputation.

Social media, for the purposes of this paper, will be defined as Internet and web-based technology platforms designed to encourage social interaction between individuals, groups and organizations and

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that enable the transformation of broadcast monologues (one to many) into social dialogues (many to many). At the very core of social media lie the empowerment of individuals and the democratization of knowledge by creating the opportunity to turn content consumers into content producers.

Social media are part of the phenomenon known as 'Web 2.0'. Web 2.0 is best understood as the result of the evolution of technology and application from the proverbial 'early days' of the Internet, where communications were largely one-way and the Internet was used as a source of information retrieval. With Web 2.0, online communication is (at least) two-way, and users can create, share and consume information, adding value to the mass of content available. Tapscott and Williams (2007) contend that Web 2.0 and social media depend on mass collaboration, with economic democracy as an outcome, as individuals simultaneously create value for themselves and others through accessible media platforms and profound network effects.

VIRAL MARKETING

The term 'viral marketing' was first coined by the firm Draper Fisher Jurvetson in 1997 to describe Hotmail's use of advertisements on the bottom of users' outgoing emails to promote its free email service (Beeler, 2000). Significant debate exists regarding the definition of viral marketing. Some argue that viral marketing is simply a technologically enhanced and expedited form of word-of-mouth marketing (Shirky, 2000; Dasari and Anandkrishnan, 2010; Phelps *et al.*, 2004), leading to the cliché 'word-of-mouth'. Others contend it is something else entirely. Modzelewski (2000), for example, argues that 'true viral marketing differs from word-of-mouth in that the value of the virus to the original consumer is directly related to the number of other users it attracts. That is, the originator of each branch of the virus has a unique and vested interest in recruiting people to the network'. (p. 30, in Phelps *et al.*, 2004)

While I discuss the component parts and antecedent conditions for viral marketing in greater depth later, my own position regarding the definition is appropriate here. I align my understanding of the concept of viral marketing more with this latter definition that viral marketing is far more than a form of word of mouth for two primary reasons. First, the term 'viral' connotes infection: rapid spreading across individuals and communities, growing exponentially with each cycle. The key to such rapid and successive spreading is that the virus is *contagious* and therefore distribution is both *self-propelled* and *exponential*. Second, 'going viral' most often refers to the spread of a *thing*—particularly in the context of social media—more so than information. Although a fact, phrase, joke and so forth may indeed be shared across networks, most often it is a picture, video, sound byte

or website that spread across networks with rapid fluidity. Almost exactly like a biological or computer virus, the object of viral marketing is 'released' into the natural environment and spreads and multiplies independent of its creator. In summary, then, I offer a definition of viral marketing here as the strategic release or seeding of branded content into the socially networked online consumer ecosystem, followed by the potentially multiplicative spread of the content through the ecosystem as hosts (consumers) receive the content and are motivated to share the branded content with other consumers. I include the word 'potentially' to specifically reinforce the notion that not all media content released into social networks will inherently go viral. (If it did, of course, marketers would have a much easier time promoting their brands through social media.)

SOCIAL MEDIA, VIRAL MARKETING AND BRANDS

So what does this environment of social media and viral marketing imply for brands and marketers? Succinctly, the implication is that firms have less control over what is being said about their brands, relinquishing the voice of authority to the consumer. In recent years, we have seen how viral marketing propagated through social media can have profound effects on brands, both positively and negatively. For example, Sony benefited greatly from one couple's creative approach to a wedding ceremony, caught on film and posted on YouTube¹ (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2010a). The couple and their bridal party danced down the aisle to a popular song by Chris Brown, who was at the time in the midst of a PR and legal crisis regarding domestic violence. As Sony saw Brown's endorsements and engagements withdrawn in rapid succession, the explosive popularity of the *JK Wedding Dance*—over 3.5 million views in the first 48 hours—led a significant proportion of the population to associate Brown with humor and matrimony, both very positive associations given the timing. Indeed, rather than claiming copyright infringement and forcing the newlyweds to remove the video, Sony opted to leave the video up and encourage viewers to donate to a domestic abuse charity.

In another example of the positive impacts of virality in social media, the rapid rise in popularity of Justin Halpern's Twitter feed *\$\$#! My Dad Says*² led to the creation of a wildly popular and recognizable brand, enabling him to expand his hobby into book publishing and television syndication. In this case, viral marketing allowed the brand owner to capitalize on social media to create demand for his content in other media outlets more easily monetizable.

¹See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-94JhLeiN0>.

²See <http://twitter.com/#!/shitmydadsays>.

In contrast, however, viral spread can have negative and lasting effects on brands. United Airlines, for example, suffered a crippling blow to brand equity when baggage handlers carelessly handled and broke customer Dave Carroll's prized guitar when loading his plane (Deighton and Kornfeld 2010b). After over a year of getting the runaround and no compensation from United headquarters, Carroll, an amateur musician, wrote a song entitled 'United Breaks Guitars',³ filmed a music video for it and posted it on YouTube. The video had over 1.6 million views in only 48 hours and within a month had reached 4.6 million viewers, become YouTube's top rated music video of all time and was receiving massive popular media attention. United's stock price dropped 10% on the day CNN picked up the story and discussed the video, costing shareholders \$180 million.

Similarly, Nestle suffered a massive blow to brand equity when Greenpeace launched a slander campaign against the use of palm oil in Kit Kat bars. Greenpeace posted a graphic video depicting the destruction of the rainforests and orangutan fingers in product packages in place of the chocolate bars. Despite Nestle's attempts to have the video removed from YouTube, members of the community reposted and spread the videos faster than they could be removed. Viewership reached 1.5 million and viewers flooded Nestle's Facebook page with comments and pleas, and after two months of public outcry and damaging brand messaging, the company made a public commitment to change its purchasing behaviors. (Greenpeace, 2010)

As brands themselves, politicians and public figures also play the viral marketing game in much the same way as traditional brands. According to the Wall Street Journal (Rove, 2011), more than a quarter of the American population received election news online—only a few percentage points behind newspapers. The Associated Press, the world's largest journalism cooperative, currently draws more traffic on YouTube than on its own website (May, 2010).

Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential campaign took advantage of social media in a way that had never been done in the political arena before, with profile pages on the most popular social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The Obama campaign managers posted over 1800 videos on the YouTube channel, garnering over 110 million views during the election (May, 2010). In the Philippines, Senator Francis 'Kiko' Pangilinan ranked 22nd in campaign spending yet became the fifth most popular candidate overall—an impressive feat, considering he was the first ever to successfully run as an independent senator. Pangilinan's success is largely attributed to massive surges in popularity and recognition with younger voters because of a 'Reality TV' series (called KTubeD) of his campaign

tour with his wife and children that he posted regularly on YouTube (Hicks, 2007). Of course, with the good comes the bad in the public arena, and politics is again no exception. New York Representative Anthony D. Weiner was forced to resign from politics and his run for Mayorship when it was uncovered and leaked online that he had been using social media websites to send explicit photographs to over half a dozen women, including a college student. On the other side of the 2008 US Presidential Election, Sarah Palin was a target of numerous viral videos mocking her background, appearance and intelligence, including one posting of an actual CNN broadcast, with over five million views, where hosts commented on similarities between Palin's actual interviews and impersonated interviews on Saturday Night Live.

As we can see, viral marketing through social media can have significant and lasting impacts on brands, both positively and negatively, as firms and campaign managers lose the ability to control what is being said about them in the public arena. This is, of course, a significant cause for concern among marketers. The problem, so to speak, is accentuated by the principles that social media is both new and constantly evolving. This leaves marketers hard-pressed to analyze, understand and then exploit social media as they have done with 'traditional' media in the past.

I posit that perhaps the best way to learn in and about this new environment is vicariously. Although we may focus on any number of examples of successes and failures, I opt here, rather, to focus our attention on one archetypal case of viral marketing in social media. Offered below is the case of Old Spice who, through 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like' campaign, brought an outdated brand back to relevance by strategically capitalizing on the potential of social media.

THE CASE OF OLD SPICE

Old Spice was launched in 1938 as a nautical-themed line of shaving soaps and aftershave lotions. Old Spice held true to its classic male brand identity for decades, with print and television advertising campaigns centered on masculine sex appeal through the end of the century. Procter & Gamble (P&G) acquired the Old Spice brand in 1990 and for the next decade focused on expanding the product line into deodorants and related products in an effort to boost sales, but results were mixed. The brand was exhibiting signs of aging along with its loyal customers, and its once-powerful messaging and imagery no longer resonated with new generations of young buyers. However, in the 2000s, male grooming products became the fastest growing segment in the grooming products market in North America. Young men aged 18–35 began paying greater attention to personal grooming and were purchasing new products such as body washes and

³See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YGc4zOqozo>.

body sprays in place of more traditional bar soaps and colognes. P&G's market research highlighted that brands of body washes and sprays targeted specifically at young men presented a massive growth opportunity.

In 2009, P&G brand managers decided that, in order to compete in the exploding market space, they needed to reposition the brand from one known as 'old' and 'meant for grandfathers' to one for the young. P&G recognized the difficulty of repositioning the brand image in the minds of men aged 18 to 35, their primary audience and market, who associated the Old Spice brand with their fathers. So instead of focusing exclusively on young, P&G expanded their target audience beyond existing category purchasers to include women, who had significant influence over men's purchases of grooming products, as well as first-time product category buyers.

To start the brand repositioning, P&G launched 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like' campaign. Created in combination with advertising agency Wieden+Kennedy, the campaign consisted of two pairs of 30- and 15-second television commercials. The initial wave of advertisements was broadcast in February 2010, the second wave of follow-up ads in June 2010. The approach of 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like' campaign was to embrace the brand's heritage while updating the messaging and imagery with more 'swagger' and timely humor.

For 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like' campaign, Isaiah Mustafa, an American actor and former NFL receiver, was introduced as the funny and attractive new spokesman and face of Old Spice. The P&G creative team wanted his iconic character to be loved equally by women and men—a 'ladies' man' who was 'OK' for men to love as well (Borden, 2010).

The first ad featured Mustafa reciting a deadpan, tongue-in-cheek monologue about how 'anything is possible' if a man used Old Spice.⁴ In this spot, Mustafa demonstrated to women how their lives could be better with a man who switched from some 'lady-scented body wash' to Old Spice body wash. Mustafa recited his dialogue in a single uninterrupted take over a series of transitioning scenery wherein the spokesman went from standing in a bathroom to walking on a sailboat to riding a horse on a beach. The cascading background scenery changes were intentionally dramatic as the iconic spokesman had to be introduced as larger than life, a character that transcended the mundane. The commercial was first launched during Super Bowl XLIV and was an instant hit, going viral on YouTube and gaining more traction than any other Super Bowl commercial that year (Gottlieb, 2010). In the five months following the first airing, the commercial attracted more than 16 million views on YouTube and gained traction

and exposure in numerous mass media outlets such as Ellen Degeneres, Oprah, CBS's *The Early Show*, TV Guide and ESPN's *First Take*. Mark Tutssel, Global Chief Advertising Officer of the Leo Burnett agency, enthused, 'It took an old, sleepy brand and woke it up and overnight wove its way into popular culture' (Turnquist, 2010).

Following on the success of 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like' ad, P&G launched a follow-up commercial called 'Questions'⁵ that was similar in nature to the first commercial. In an interesting reversal, the advertisement aired on YouTube first, then in movie theaters over the following weekend and then through national television spots the following week. The 'Questions' ad gained viral exposure much faster than the original ad, riding on the buzz and hype from the first wave of the campaign; in only one month, the ad reached 11 million views on YouTube (Stone, 2010).

In the third wave of the campaign, P&G took the brand to real-time internet with the 'Old Spice Responses' campaign.⁶ Multiple social networks were seeded with an invitation to the public to ask questions of Mustafa's character. Over 150 questions were selected according to brand relevance and the user asking the question—a number of questions from high-profile internet personalities and celebrities were selected, because of the larger potential downstream exposure. These users received direct responses to their questions from Mustafa in the form of short, funny and personalized YouTube videos. The personalized 'Responses' campaign created a significant amount of buzz around the brand in popular culture, although it only ran online for a short three-day period and had a budget significantly lower than previous commercials. It combined unique advertising, creative writing and the proficient use of social media as a two-way communication channel to activate mainstream brand coverage. 'Old Spice Responses' topped 6 million total views and 60 000 Tweets in the first 24 hours on YouTube, receiving more viewer traffic than President Obama's victory speech. Old Spice saw body wash product sales increase 107% in July 2010 alone, and data supplied by consultant Sanford C. Bernstein showed substantial increases in the ad-specific product line, with sales up 29% from four months prior to the campaign (Parpis, 2010; O'Leary and Wasserman, 2010).

SEEKING ANSWERS FROM THE LITERATURE

There is no 'one way' to understand why, how and when things go viral online. There is no single path to success or step-by-step guide for marketing

⁴See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGykVbfgUE>

⁵See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLTIowBF0kE>

⁶See <http://www.youtube.com/user/OldSpice#p/c/484F058C3EAF7EA6>

success in social media. Rather, a plethora of solutions begins to emerge in the literature, each shaded by the unique perspectives from which the authors approach the subject matter.

Of the authors who agree that viral marketing is something more than an evolution of word-of-mouth marketing, Southgate (2010) takes a relatively traditional approach to understanding virality, suggesting that advertising measures such as distinctiveness, celebrity endorsement, enjoyment and branding generate consumer awareness online in much the same way they do offline. Dobele *et al.* (2007), however, propose that successful viral marketing goes further than traditional push advertising by triggering consumers' emotional responses and that campaigns must contain elements of surprise and capture the imagination of the recipients.

As discussed earlier, at the very core of viral marketing is the contagious nature of the content resulting in exponential spreading across social networks. In analyzing what motivates users to share content, Ho and Dempsey (2010) discover that users inclined to be individualistic and/or altruistic tended to share content more so than others. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) suggest that while tie strength between online network members facilitates awareness of campaigns, particularly at the outset, perceptual affinity—the similarity of receiver to sender with respect to values, attitudes and tastes—is the key to success in generating interest on the receiving end of a viral cycle. Similarly, at an organizational level, Phelps *et al.* (2004) discuss the importance of strategically targeting audiences that will be receptive and open to the message of the campaign.

Existing literature on the subject of viral marketing in social media approaches from various unique perspectives. However, it seems that even in concert these propositions still leave marketers largely in the dark with respect to a tangible and actionable theoretical framework. Herein I propose a four-tiered conceptual model of virality, grounded in lessons learned from the successes and failures of the Old Spice campaign.

THE SPIN FRAMEWORK OF VIRALITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

In deconstructing successful campaigns, as epitomized by the Old Spice campaign, I identify four key drivers of success for viral marketing: the spreadability of content based on personal factors, the propagativity of content based on media type, the integration of multiple media platforms and the successive reinforcement of messaging. These drivers are to be viewed in order, as stages of strategic advancement of a campaign. Although I do not attempt to provide methods of generating creative and unique ideas for brand messaging in this paper, what I strive to propose here is a step-by-step and actionable

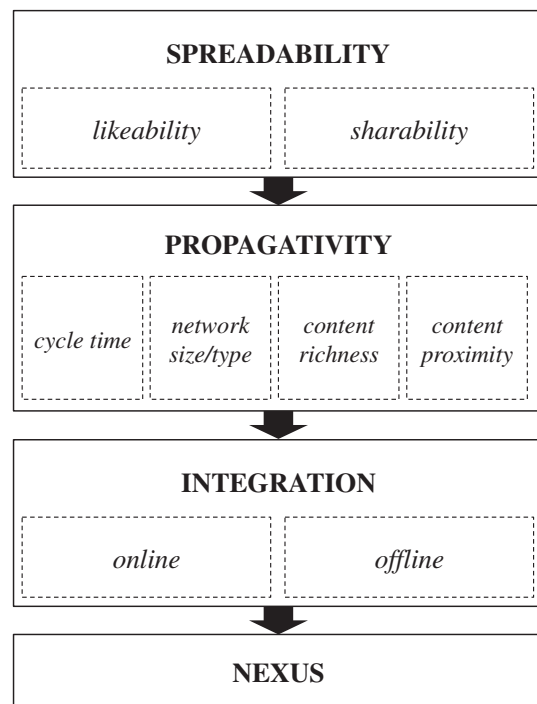


Figure 1 The SPIN Framework

framework for social media marketers and brand managers (Figure 1).

Spreadability

Much like we find margarine covers our toast more efficiently than cold butter, the concept of spreadability refers to the ease with which a campaign flows across social networks. Although the least tangible of the four stages, this is the first requirement of any viral campaign. Without the innate ability to spread organically, or contagiously, a campaign is destined for failure. Because the creator of content has little control over its path once the virus is 'released' into the social network, the spread of a campaign relies on the carriers or 'hosts' of the messaging. Whether the virus gets passed from one host to the next, wherein the recipient becomes the sender, depends largely on the ability of the message to appeal in some way to the consumer. The crux of this transition from receiver to sender is motivation.

I suggest that motivation can be analyzed from both input and output perspectives, or the willingness to consume and the willingness to distribute. One's willingness to consume is related to the *likeability* of the content. Likeability refers to the degree to which the message is stimulating or engaging in some emotional or intellectual way. When a message appeals to a consumer, the consumer therefore becomes a willing and receptive audience for the content. One's willingness to distribute content, then, is related to the *sharability* of the message. In much the same way we understand likeability, sharability refers to the degree to which the consumer feels that the content will have a similar effect (of stimulation or

engagement) on others in their social network. Whether content is shared with others is also related to the perceived social value the content provides the sender, or what our economist peers would call 'relational utility'.

Spreadability then is the sum of two parts: how likeable the content is from the perspective of the recipient and how sharable the content is from the perspective of the sender. Because the roles of recipient and sender are played by the individual consumer, spreadability can be viewed as the degree to which the consumer is motivated to shift roles and redistribute the message.

Propagativity

Once the consumer is motivated to spread content, the second key to success of a viral campaign is propagativity. Although similar in nature to the concept of spreadability (the *who* and *why*), propagativity refers to the ease with which consumers are able to redistribute content (the *how*).

The properties of the selected medium of propagation can have a significant impact on the spread of a campaign. Social media platforms, although commonly discussed in the collective sense, are quite distinct and therefore offer unique advantages and disadvantages. Four important considerations in selecting media are (i) ease and speed of propagation, (ii) network size and type, (iii) richness of content and (iv) proximity of content.

The ease and speed of propagation refers to the technical accessibility and functionality of the means of redistribution to the consumer. What effort is required from the consumer to redistribute content? Forwarding an email, for example, requires far more commitment (multiple mouse clicks and keystrokes) than sharing a post on Facebook (with as few as two mouse clicks). There is, of course, a natural inclination to believe that faster is better—that is, Twitter is better than YouTube is better than email is better than a written letter—but this may not always be the case. Cycle time in the propagativity stage is only one of the factors to consider.

Network size and type refer to the nature of the consumer's immediately connected (readily accessible) social network on any given media platform. To use the above example, an email contact list may have several dozen possible recipients whereas a Facebook or Twitter contact list may have several hundreds or even several thousands. The type of network is also an important factor to consider and is related to the nature and closeness of the relationships of individuals in the network. The email contact list, although smaller, may consist of primarily close friends and associates with whom constant communication is common; the Facebook or Twitter contact list, although much wider in breadth, may be shallower in depth as the practice of 'friending' or 'following' others with whom one is often only casually

acquainted is quite common. An obvious assumption is likely that bigger is better with respect to network size, particularly when discussing viral marketing, but again it should be cautioned that a solid strategy takes into account all four factors of propagativity.

Each social media platform, by virtue of their technological architecture and intent, is geared toward distribution of content of different natures. For example, where Twitter is designed to allow sharing of short text messages only, YouTube is designed to allow sharing of video content and textual feedback on that content. Flickr operates in a similar fashion but for still images rather than video. Facebook, email and blogs are designed to integrate text and multimedia files but may be constrained by size or clarity. The selection of medium of propagation in this light influences and is influenced by the richness (in a technical sense) of campaign content.

Lastly, proximity of content refers to the distance between the content that is being consumed and the means of redistribution. Whether content is centimeters away from a 'share' button or whether content is found on another website or platform and simply teased out through the distribution media can also have an effect on propagativity. Similar to the ease and speed of propagation by virtue of the distribution medium, the proximity of content to the distribution medium can also be significant. This principle is a conceptual offshoot of the prior point. For example, if a social media campaign such as the Greenpeace Kit Kat ad relies on video, distribution over the Twitter platform would only allow users to share links to the video (requiring redirection to a video-hosting platform)—this requires the consumer to receive content on one page, leave that page for another to consume content, then return to the original page to redistribute content.

Spreadability and propagativity are the two cornerstones of viral marketing in social media. Without these two components, virality is likely impossible, so with them, we might infer that virality is inevitable. Indeed, many, and perhaps most, social media marketing campaigns are not developed beyond this point. Although there may be a plethora of examples of user-generated content that has gone viral after achieving only these two factors, very rarely does a *campaign* succeed in going viral without the following step(s).

Integration

Successful brand-oriented viral campaigns, such as the examples cited earlier in this paper, maximize exposure and spread by strategically employing multiple social media platforms. By doing so, mass exposure to content grows not only by spreading through several social networks simultaneously but also by allowing the networks to feed each other, therefore spreading truly exponentially.

The most straightforward integration occurs between several online social media platforms. For example, simultaneous campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and a branded website all allow for parallel content to be distributed simultaneously, customized for the unique capabilities of the particular platform. Old Spice's 'Responses' campaign, for example, used Twitter (with short text-based messages, large peer networks and relatively rapid redistribution) to field the questions portion of their campaign but used YouTube (with multimedia functionality, publicly available content and the ability to link/share back to Twitter and Facebook) to distribute the answers to the questions. As another example, Justin Halpern, creator of the *My Dad Says* Twitter page, was able to greatly expand his fan base by replicating his blog content first in printed book form and then to syndicated television and using the three distribution channels to promote one another.

More complex, but rewarding, integration occurs when marketers take this principle one step further to launch campaigns in offline or 'traditional' media as well as online. Often, although running campaigns exclusively online may be more cost-effective for the firm, truly explosive growth in viral exposure requires a catalyst that can be provided by mainstream and therefore widespread exposure. Mass exposure, in whatever depth, reinforces and accelerates the viral spread of a campaign (Keller and Fay, 2009; Graham and Havlena, 2007; Nail, 2007) particularly if the first two key success factors are in place.

Part of the remarkable success of the Old Spice campaign was the integration of social and broadcast media, particularly with respect to strategically capitalizing on Super Bowl viewership numbers and demographics. The remarkable viral spread of the 'United Breaks Guitars' video would likely have been impossible without significant coverage in the mainstream media—Consumer Reports, the LA Times, Huffington Post, NBC, CNN and CBS to name a few—because of its journalistic appeal (a genuine David vs. Goliath story).

Successful viral campaigns, those we consider memorable and influential, achieve these three success factors of spreadability, propagativity and integration. But it is the last stage, nexus, which truly sends a viral campaign into the marketing stratosphere.

Nexus

Examples of viral campaigns that achieve this final stage are as few and far between as the Jedi marketers behind them. Yet these are the ones we will likely never forget.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1996) defines nexus as 'a connection or link between things, persons, or events especially that is or is part of a chain of causation'. In the scope of this framework, nexus refers to the *successive*

reinforcement of the campaign by virtue of sequentially releasing units of viral content.

The impact of this can be seen even independently of our conceptual discussion about social media marketing here. For any brand, organization or individual content creator, to leave consumers eager for more, anticipating the next 'chapter' of communications, is the epitome of engagement. Customers of all ages line up overnight to purchase the latest Harry Potter novels, for example, because the books offer content that appeals to a wide demographic, engages and connects with readers at an emotional level and end leaving readers wanting more.

The Old Spice campaign was successful for these same reasons and is one of the very few firm-directed social media campaigns to excel in all four strategic stages. By launching several equally viral commercials in succession (first 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like' and second 'Questions') and then shifting gears to a more intimate and interactive approach with over 100 customized videos in 'Responses' campaign, Old Spice was able to layer and build on their viral successes, keeping their consumers engaged and their brand top-of-mind over an extended period of time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

A major driving principle behind social media, as discussed earlier, is the shift in communication patterns between official sources—brands, firms, politicians, lawmakers or government agencies—and the public, our consumers. Where one-way communication has been the public norm for decades, two-way communication and even the ability of the public to communicate about us and without our endorsement are the new standards we must embrace. As such, we can no longer speak *at* our audience, we must speak *with* them.

Although I have induced the SPIN Framework from a number of online viral marketing campaigns, most notably the Old Spice advertising campaign, the framework is no less relevant to policy makers and public representatives than it is to advertising executives. Research shows that viral marketing is most successful in building brand awareness rather than specifically driving sales of a product (Rove, 2011; Chiu *et al.*, 2007). As such, public policy makers benefit from a deeper understanding of viral media marketing as much as marketers and advertisers do. In mounting campaigns, for example, the SPIN Framework may be used as a guiding principle for public officials when executing social media strategies:

- All content 'released' to social media platforms should be considered with respect to the recipients' perspectives, as much or more so than the sender's—although we may craft campaign components to say exactly what we want, there will

be no viral spread if our content does not appeal to our audience.

- If messages are better shared through video content with greater richness, YouTube may provide a better platform to mount a campaign. However, if an interactive and information-driven dialogue is to be encouraged, Twitter or Facebook may provide more suitable platforms for launch.
- Launching a campaign requires a coordination of multiple online and offline channels. If social media is strategically implemented as part of a broader campaign rather than as an *ad hoc* addition, other types of promotion and exposure can serve to drive audience traffic back to the social media dialogue forums. Printed collateral, public appearances and even news media interviews, all discrete events, can serve as valuable methods of promoting an *ongoing* campaign online, where users can be exposed to content as discussed above.
- Lastly, social media participation must be consistent and ongoing. Generating awareness and building an audience base takes time, and a successful way of growing this audience base more effectively is by releasing valuable content on an ongoing basis. As such, if a campaign will include a number of video clips, for example, the recommendation is to launch these as a series over a given period of time, rather than all at once.

CONCLUSION

Viral marketing in social media is the uncharted wilderness of marketing theory, leaving brand-managing pioneers to blaze trails so that others may follow in their footsteps and learn from their failures and successes. I hope that by first offering a foundational description of the social media environment with particular attention to brands in both traditional and public policy arenas, next offering a case study as an archetype of viral campaign successes and finally proposing a conceptual model for understanding virality in social media, something valuable and actionable has been provided. I propose the SPIN model of virality in social media not as a concrete and final classification of the object of our study but rather as a few more cautious steps forward into unmapped territory so that others who follow may obtain a better perspective of what is next to explore.

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