

DIFFUSION OF VIRAL MAREKTING INTO
THE WORLD OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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by
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TO MOM, DAD, ERIK AND NICOLE

Thank you for holding me up when it seemed like I would fall. I love you.

“Hold fast to dreams for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.”

-Langston Hughes

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DIFFUSION OF VIRAL MARKETING INTO THE WORLD OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

With the ever-changing world of technology, consumers can be reached through more and more media. These opportunities are only possible if the advertising and public relations industries follow their audiences and understand how to reach them effectively. This research examined how the public relations industry was adopting the technique of viral marketing. This method of delivery allows messages to be subtly given to audiences and then gives consumers control to pass that message along to their friends. Since marketing is attached to this technique, and it was an advertising technique initially, it was predicted that public relations would avoid using viral marketing to reach their audiences.

To perform this research, textual and thematic analysis were completed. Four trade journals were analyzed, *Advertising Age*, *AD Week*, *PR Week*, and *PR News*, two from advertising and two from public relations, and they were analyzed in relation to the diffusion of innovations theory. The comparison of the two allowed for trends to be pulled out from the 200 articles that were sampled and read. What was found was that public relations professionals are laggards in terms of adopting viral marketing. It is important for public relations to understand that they must follow their audience on-line and build brand relationships with them through the social means of viral marketing.

[1] INTRODUCTION

With less and less people trusting and paying attention to traditional advertising, advertisers and marketers are turning to more innovative ways to reach their audiences, and viral marketing is one of them. Public relations is now realizing the benefits of viral marketing and is trying to integrate it into its tactics. There are issues that arise though for public relations managers to be associated with a marketing technique. This research aims to discover how public relations is overcoming those stereotypes and integrating this technique into their strategies. With ever changing technology, it is important to stay on top of the trends and continue to reach audiences in creative ways. The importance of this study lies in that statement. Practitioners and academics must understand how viral marketing is being implemented and transformed to better fit the intentions of public relations agencies.

Viral marketing is such a new phenomenon in the marketing world that not much research has currently been done on its impact to marketers and society. What is known though is that it can produce far-reaching results for advertisers looking to reach the mass audiences that traditional methods no longer satisfy. The Internet is now giving the tried and true method of word of mouth communication a new angle, and new way for marketers to reach more people (Vilpponen, Winter, & Sundqvist, 2006). Viral marketing can have the same effects as word of mouth communication through a peer's affect on a person's attitudes and behaviors toward a product and service. Putting theories and practice together will help practitioners create effective campaigns that

spread their message to the people that will have a vested interest in what information it is giving them.

Supplying consumers with new ways to be affected by advertising will reactivate the results that traditional advertising once produced. Advertisers have the job of grabbing the attention of consumers and then influencing their attitudes, and with as fast as the world changes, there are more ways for people to ignore advertising. Advertisers must turn to the more innovative ways like viral marketing to send campaign messages. The research that can and should be done on this topic can only benefit advertisers in their quest for reaching consumers.

As one can see, as of right now, much viral marketing talk is directed towards advertisers. Public relations practitioners also need to grab the attention of the audience, but with different motivations. The ways that public relations once reached their audiences is no longer enough, just as advertising found traditional methods are no longer as effective as they once were. New media is the wave of the future and in order to reach target markets, all must turn to the Internet. Viral marketing is the new, credible way for companies to effectively promote their products or services.

As with any new innovation, there are complexities with using it. These involve definitions, names, and techniques. Since many see a dichotomy between advertising and public relations the use of viral marketing in both fields causes even more confusion. The relevance of this paper falls in within this separation of the two and what it means for the proliferation of viral marketing. Since one can plainly see that agencies in both fields must move with technology, this is a topic that cannot be ignored. This paper hopes to explore how each field is using the technique, but more importantly what are the

differences. This will help practitioners and academics understand how public relations is adopting viral marketing into their field of work.

This paper will address how to define viral marketing and how it is currently being used. This initial step will look at previous literature in order to discover a working definition that can be applied to the later research that will be performed. Social networks are a key aspect in viral marketing, and they will also be examined. This aspect will give more insight into the importance of viral marketing and how agencies are using the method. The diffusion of innovations theory will be applied to the topic by looking at viral marketing as an innovation for public relations. Lastly, the conceptual topics that caused this research to take place will be studied, which include definitions of public relations and advertising, and how the two relate to each other and marketing. By looking at the current literature on each of these topics, it will give a clearer picture of the themes that will be important to look for when performing the primary research.

This research will be accomplished by analyzing advertising and public relations trade journals. A textual and thematic analysis will allow the researcher to extract the themes that are found when professionals discuss viral marketing. By looking at the differences between advertising and public relations, it will be easier to determine the ways in which public relations is accepting the method. It is expected that there will be some changes made to viral marketing in order to make it more appealing and acceptable to the public relations field. These changes include the name and the techniques of applying it to campaigns. This area of research is exploratory; therefore, this will be a base for future research. It is imperative set the groundwork to be able to understand what is happening in the field before more in depth research can begin.

[2] THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The diffusion of innovations theory was first defined in the 1960s with the exploration of rural farmers' adoption of hybrid corn seed. This theory examines how new ideas, practices, and objects are disseminated among a network of people through interpersonal and mass communication means. The classic model for this has four main elements including: "1. The innovation, defined as an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual or other relevant unit of adoption, 2. Which is communicated through certain channels, 3. Over time, 4. Among the members of a social system" (Rogers, 1976, pp. 292). Rogers and Singhal (1996) then studied the adoption rate of new medical procedures of rural doctors to discover how ideas are passed between a social group. He then noted that word of mouth communication can fit into the diffusion model in relation to interpersonal communication and where mass communication is then involved.

Diffusion of innovations occurs when consumers go through "a mental process through which an individual passes from first hearing about an innovation to final adoption" (Rogers, 1962, pp. 76). Consumers must make their own decisions about the information that they receive to determine whether or not they will adopt the innovation based on the meanings and consequences of other decisions. There are five stages that a person will go through to complete and adoption and they are outlined by Rogers (1962) and include several decisions such as observing a problem, making an analysis of it,

deciding the available courses of action, taking action, and then accepting the consequences of those decisions. Consumers typically make these decisions at different adoption rates. Rogers (1995) classifies these as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Each holds numerous, yet different characteristics along the adoption curve. Looking at this shows that diffusion of innovations is not simply a technical matter, instead, it is a social process (Rogers 1995).

Ideas as Innovation

Viral marketing is an innovation and, therefore, it can be diffused through agencies much like new products are diffused among consumers. In this case the public relations agencies are consumers that are trying out viral marketing for the first time. Rodgers and Chen (2002) examined post-adoption attitudes of Internet advertising with advertising and public relations industries. An important aspect of this theory that they pointed out was that the innovation adoption depended on relative advantage and complexity. Relative advantage refers to the way in which an adopter considers the innovation to have an advantage over previous methods of completing a task. Complexity refers to the difficulty level of the use and implementation of the innovation in the eyes of the adopter. These two factors play a large role into whether an agency would adopt viral marketing. If there is a relative advantage and a low complexity perceived by the practitioner, the adoption of viral marketing will be likely, and vice versa.

An interesting note in this research that may be seen in the results of the current research is that public relations firms had more positive post-adoption attitudes toward the Internet compared to advertising agencies. They had more confidence in their ability to

use the new technology (Rodgers, Chen, 2002). With this current research, it is proposed that this will contradict what will be found in terms of viral marketing. The attachment of marketing to the name of the method seems like an inhibitor, which would make the public relations field laggards when adopting viral marketing. Like Rodgers and Chen (2002) looked at the attitudes after adoption though, this research will try to determine how viral marketing is perceived which in turn affects its ultimate adoption.

In much the same vein, Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) diffusion was studied when it was introduced to Asian countries (Kitchen, Li, 2005; Kim, Han, Schultz, 2004). IMC is a concept surrounding strategic communications, and the research done looks at how well agencies in China and South Korea adopted this concept and how workers felt about integrating IMC into their corporate culture. One problem with the adoption of IMC into these cultures is not only the difference in business administration, but also in the way that the communication is bundled. There were problems with having all types of communication, advertising, marketing, and public relations, fall under the same umbrella term. It is believed that these same problems with the name of viral marketing will be found in this research.

Technology is another area of innovation that is studied using this theory model. Many universities consider technology transfer a way to marketing intellectual property which again shows that ideas are innovations that can be adopted or not (Coppola, 2006). The growth of technology is followed through the S-curves that Rogers created so many years ago, and demonstrates that there are times when failure occurs. That is another topic that will be looked at with the diffusion of viral marketing through public relations agencies.

[3] REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Viral Marketing: What is it?

The actual term *viral* is what turns people off to this technique because of the word's negative connotation. But, the origination of the term does come from a disease driven definition. Jurveston noted that the proliferation of a message was "from an epidemiological perspective, as if Zeus sneezed over a planet" (Jurveston, 2000). He then consulted his physician wife and learned "that a sneeze released 2 million particles" (Kharif, 2000; Porter & Golan, 2006, pp. 31). It can then be seen that this new technique spread information much like a virus, and the name viral marketing was created.

Since the advent of Hotmail, a free web-based e-mail service provider, in 1996, viral marketing became a new phenomenon. It launched this e-mail system from zero to 12 million users in just 18 months while spending very little on their advertising budget (Jurvetson, 2000). This had never happened before, and their method needed a definition. Jurvetson (2000) simply defined viral marketing as, "networked-enhanced word of mouth."

What was created by Hotmail was an essential aspect of viral marketing that every campaign will have. Audiences better receive viral marketing than third party advertising because it is an implied endorsement from a friend. While it is still labeled as advertising, it is more powerful than a traditional advertisement because people give added credibility to their friends' recommendations (Jurveston, 2000).

Viral marketing does more than just use the Internet to send advertising messages, it uses pre-existing social networks to quickly and cheaply diffuse a message, better than traditional advertising. This is supported by research on the topic. According to Porter and Golan (2006, pp. 30), it “relies on provocative content to motivate unpaid peer-to-peer communication of persuasive messages from identified sponsors.” Helm (2000, pp. 159) also describes this technique as “ a communication and distribution concept that relies on customers to transmit digital products via electronic mail to other potential customers in their social sphere and to animate these contacts to also transmit the products.”

Additionally, Welker (2002, pp. 4) used the Hotmail example to explain viral marketing as “strategies that allow an easier, accelerated, and cost reduced transmission of messages by creating environments for a self-replicating, exponentially increasing diffusion, spiritualization, and impact of the message.” It is clear that viral marketing is efficient, not costly, and sends trusted messages quickly among peers.

Phelps, et al (2004) says that viral marketing means “encouraging honest communication among consumers.” Viral marketing allows consumers to control the content; they decide if others will receive the advertising message. Hotmail was such a success because it followed the basic definitions outlined here and allowed the parent company to do little to promote itself among users while growing in a way that traditional advertising cannot offer.

Drawbacks of Viral Marketing

It is important to remember that with such a great sounding idea, there are limitations and drawbacks. One problem is that there are certain products that lend

themselves nicely to viral marketing, and if the inappropriate products try to diffuse using this method, a counterproductive effect might occur and cause unfavorable attitudes towards those products (Leskovec et al., 2007). Since viral marketing is ultimately controlled by the consumer, “information passed on by customers might be filtered, incomplete, and biased” (Helm, 2000, pp. 160). Porter and Golan (2006) agree on this subject and recognized that companies give consumers a certain amount of control over the product and brand when it is released virally; viral marketers cannot watch or manage what is happening to the message (Helm, 2000; Welker, 2002).

Another problem to take into consideration is the idea of ‘spam.’ People may believe that these messages are junk mail that is not important enough to either send on or open. “E-mail saturation and misuse (spam) of the medium may already depress response rates” (Phelps et al., 2004, pp. 334). Even with these issues, viral marketing should not be dismissed because of its many benefits for companies.

Viral marketing allows advertisers to reach millions of people with ease and low cost. This method can be successful in diffusing new products, as seen with the Hotmail example. Viral marketing can add a credibility that traditional advertising cannot because it is peer-to-peer communication, not advertiser to consumer communication. It is an innovative advertising technique that cannot be overlooked because of its wide reaching possibilities.

Viral Marketing: Content and Who to Target

As addressed earlier, one of the concerns with viral marketing is the products that lend themselves best to this form of advertising. With that, it is necessary to look at the content of messages and discover what messages are best received and then passed along.

There will also be some discussion about whom to target and why they pass along viral messages. Knowing this will allow advertisers to send the correct messages to the correct people.

Who to Target

The content that is in the message will ultimately decide who receives that original message. After that, it is beyond the viral marketer's control. Phelps et al. (2004) describes two of the best types of people to which to market. One is *Viral Mavens*, which is a group of frequent e-mail senders who are likely to send viral messages to their peers; the other is *Infrequent Senders* who are less likely to send e-mails and more leery of these types of e-mails. Obviously, it seems Viral Mavens should be contacted to send messages, but Infrequent Senders should not be ignored. It seems that the one of the major problems in why they send less messages is simply because they receive less. Therefore, a marketer just needs to send them relevant and interesting e-mails, and they will eagerly pass them along (Phelps et al., 2004). The content of the messages is what determines if these messages will be passed along.

Content

The research that has currently been conducted concerning the content of viral marketing is limited, but all point in the same direction. Emotionally charged (humorous, fearful, sad, or inspirational) e-mails will be the best received by consumers and most likely to be passed on to peers (Welker, 2002; Phelps et al., 2004). It is also important to look at the motivations and desires of the people that are receiving the original messages. For example, "nonprofit organizations with public service goals may pay special attention to the important role of social motivations" (Phelps et al., 2004, pp. 346). There are

“common human motivators” that produce incentives for consumers to share information with others, and to fill those niche needs, many times humor is the common filler (Porter & Golan 2006, pp. 31; Welker, 2002). Tapping into strong emotions is one of the best ways to have a successful viral campaign, along with a product that lends itself to this type of direct marketing.

Norman and Russell (2006) studied the motivations for passing along e-mails with an Internet based survey. It found that there was little motivation in relation to self-interest, such as being entered into a \$500 lottery for participation. People were more interested in passing along e-mails if they were involved with the product and had a high relationship with the survey topic. They were also more likely to do so if they had a large amount of ties in their social network, and those ties shared common interest in the topic.

Ultimately, it is the product or message content that will control who receives the viral message from their peers. Leskovec, Adamic, and Humberman (2007) agree that the interest of the parties involved is one of the most influential aspects of whether a message will be passed along. They state that marketers should analyze the demographics and psychographics, including their interests of the social networks, of their customers.

Having a clear understanding of who the target audience is and what they are involved in is the only way to have a successful viral marketing campaign.

Having that basic understanding of how a company’s product matches their target audiences’ beliefs is essential for viral marketing. For a successful campaign, one must have a product, content in the message, and an audience that complement each other. This cohesiveness will encourage original message receivers to send that message to their peers and start the brilliance of viral marketing.

Social Networks: On and Off-line Communities

Viral marketing exploits existing social networks to send its messages. A social network is “a set of people (or organizations or other social entities) connected by a set of social relationships, such as friendship, co-working or information exchange” (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1997). Wellman (2001, pp. 228) continues this definition by stating that social networks provide for “sociability support, information, and sense of belonging.” No longer do social networks have to be defined by physical proximity, the Internet allows for social networks that consist of people with similar interests. With the proliferation of the Internet, the term social network is questioned and many wonder if a social network can be just as strong on-line as off-line.

Internet Relationships

People are turning to the Internet to communicate with each other, particularly over e-mail, and they do this to maintain interpersonal relationships (McKenna & Bargh, 2003; Wellman, 2001). McKenna and Bargh (2003) have found that the Internet does bring people together because their lives are actively shaped by this emerging technology. The Internet is actually a place for people to create relationships on a deeper basis such as shared values and beliefs, and personal desires and goals, which all negates media stories toting the negative connotations of the Internet making people depressed and lonely (McKenna & Bargh, 2003). Wellman (2001, pp. 229) conducted a similar study and found that “cyberspace has become cyberplace;” the Internet is not an isolating medium, instead it brings people together on and off-line.

Some dynamics of the Internet that support social networks include: making the household an important base for computer-supported social networks and therefore

contacting neighbors more often because it is seen as less intrusive, greater involvement in networks with shared interests, better connectivity within social networks which include feelings of belonging, feeling wanted, and shared identity (Wellman, 2001). All of this is evidence that the Internet is a place for people with common interests to come together and share information with each other.

Forming Friendships

Carter (2005) conducted a study that looked at an on-line and off-line community called Cybercity and how friendships were formed on-line. It found that the Internet has become an integral part of the everyday life for the people in Cybercity. It is a place for them to meet more friends and many times those friendships are being moved off-line. No longer are relationships confined to include people in the workplace or home to sustain friendships (Carter, 2005). Another such study was done by Wellman (2001) with Netville in Toronto, Canada. Here, the Internet brought together the people of the community and encouraged them to meet off-line. Such connection over the Internet is particularly being seen in the workplace.

More and more people are turning to their pre-existing networks at work and in learning environments to gain knowledge (Wellman, 2001; Cho et al., 2005). Cho et al. (2005) found that for networks to thrive, there needed to be a meaningful sense of shared identity. This connection builds lasting ties between the network members, which are important to understand for viral marketing.

Internet Harm

The view that the Internet can harm social relationships must not be ignored. There has been research done that states that the Internet actually disconnects people

from local and family interaction, and people belong to these communities where the other members have unconfirmed identities (Kraut et al, 1998; Nie 2001). A longitudinal study performed by Kraut et al. (1998) found that using the Internet for communication caused decreased communication with family members in the household, a decrease in the size of social circles, and increases in depression and loneliness. This study is a couple of years old, and newer research, which has been discussed shows opposite findings, and it only studied people who spent a large amount of time on the Internet.

Nie (2001) did find similar results with surveys as Kraut. It was found that the Internet does not cause users to become more sociable, but instead that they already display those characteristics. And, the surveys suggested that the Internet may reduce interpersonal interaction and communication (Nie, 2001). The Internet can still provide a place for people to come together and interact, and for advertisers, they can have discussions about products.

Even with some findings not supporting the Internet's positive role in the formation and maintenance of social networks, it cannot be denied that people use the Internet to communicate. There is enough evidence to prove that social networks with shared interests can be useful conduits for viral marketing. It is those pre-existing networks that advertisers can tap into to send messages that will be gladly shared within the networks.

Public relations officers are now recognizing the power of the Internet connecting organizations with their stakeholders. A two-way communication, in which public relations boasts, is now even more possible with the Internet and social networks agencies can create. There is no longer uni-directional communication with stakeholders,

just telling them what they need to know. It is now a communication with and between stakeholders (van der Merwe, Pitt and Abratt, 2005). Strength is given to stakeholders because public relations managers are creating online social networks for them which gives them a voice in the organization's actions.

What exactly is public relations?

There is actually a confusion within the entire public relations profession as how to define itself. Part of the problem is the fact that there are many areas of specialty and diversity within the practice (Black, Sharpe, 1983). Many feel that the term 'public relations' is a tainted term with negative connotations of being spin-doctors and all publicity is good publicity (Wragg, 1992; Tilley, 2005). According to Tilley (2005), there are companies that ban the term public relations from their corporate titles because it implies such terrible, brainless actions. Something to consider when trying to define public relations is to know what is not public relations.

Publicity many times is thought of as interchangeable with public relations. This is highly mistaken. Publicity is actually a tool of public relations, it is an avenue to get information out to publics (Smith, 1996; Black and Sharpe, 1983). Confusion also lies in the term 'publics' because it does not mean that managers deal solely with the general public. Publics include stakeholders, which are customers, employees, shareholders, management, and more (Wragg, 1992; Tilley, 2005; Cropp, Pincus, 2001). The range of activities that a public relations officer performs is so wide and varied that it also leads to confusion. These include: media relations, employee communications, investor relations, political relations, corporate identity, sponsorship, community relations, and customer

relations (Wragg, 1992). There is so much involved with public relations that the line often gets blurred between it and other professions.

Encroachment

A growing trend that is occurring is what Lauzen (1992) and others call “Public Relations Encroachment.” This occurs when professionals in other fields such as marketing, law, human resources, or engineering become top professionals in the public relations department at a company. This causes a rethinking of what public relations actually is and many times in corporations it just becomes a technical support function instead of being part of central management (Lauzen, 1992). The problem here being that a manager role has much more power and influence than a technician role does (Kelly, 1994). This occurs when the public relations department is weak and another department, particularly marketing takes over. This encroachment on the public relations function does not help to have a working definition of the profession.

According to Black and Sharpe (1983),

“the purpose of public relations is to establish a two-way communication to resolve conflicts of interest by seeking common ground or areas of mutual interest, and to establish understanding based on truth, knowledge, and full information” (pg. 3).

This is a slightly dated explanation of public relations and more recent academics would disagree with this idea of public relations being a function of two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical models. Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, and Mitrook (1997) took a more practical look at public relations and realized that using a continuum from pure advocacy to pure accommodation was a more accurate depiction of how public relations works with its publics.

So, the definition is still unclear and different scholars have different ideas of what the purpose of public relations actually is. It is actually not only scholars that have been working at this conundrum, but professionals, professional associations, like Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and trade publications have all attempted to nail down a definition. It seems that there is no one answer and organizations define the department according to the functions that it needs to perform for the company (Fritz, Pincus, 2001).

From all the literature, it can be broadly assumed that public relations is a management function that helps an organization to mediate between its policies and its multiple publics through a variety of techniques. While that is a vague understanding of the field, it does show that managers must work with all involved in a company and appease all.

So, What About Advertising?

As with public relations, there is some uncertainty with how to define advertising. With the ever changing technology, advertising must change to follow their audiences. This makes defining the field difficult and constantly changing. A general definition created from elements of numerous attempts at a definition is, “Advertising is a paid nonpersonal communication from an identified sponsor, using mass media to persuade or influence an audience” (Richards, Curran 2002, pp. 64). There is still debate with this definition because of the way that technology has allowed more targeted messages at consumers, therefore negating the mass media aspect of this definition (Richards, Curran, 2002).

What advertising is not is marketing. Marketing is a much broader concept that involves the four P's which are product, place, promotion, and price. Advertising is a subset of promotion (Brierley, 2002). The two concepts work together, but are not one in the same. Marketing is the umbrella term under which many believe advertising and public relations fall as functions of the process. It will be addressed later that not all in public relations feel that it belongs in the same realm of marketing. Advertising though cannot deny that in order for promotion to take place, the practice must be utilized.

Purpose of Advertising

A better question could be, "why advertise?" This question is addressed more by scholars and authors than the question of the actual definition of the practice. Brierley (2002) points out three of those reasons. The most common use of advertising is to increase sales or use of a product or service. A long-term profit goal may be a more beneficial, but advertising can help. Advertising can also work to improve a company's corporate image by "persuad[ing] people that the company is benevolent and trustworthy" (pp. 45). The last function of advertising that Brierley spells out is social advertising, which attempts to change people's behavior. Examples include anti-smoking and anti-drug campaigns.

Smith (1996) looks at advertising's purpose from a more business-like perspective. In this case, advertising is used to send the most persuasive messages to the target audience. It must be the most creative and attention-getting way possible. But, in this perspective, technology is taken into account and realizes that these messages can be much more tailored to reach very specific audiences, not just mass amounts of people for the same bill. It must be remembered that advertising is a powerful tool for companies.

“Advertising informs, it sells, and it enables businesses of all sizes to move forward and upward” (Smith, 1996, pp. 37). So while there may not be one agreed upon definition, one thing that cannot be ignored is advertising’s power in the market place.

The Confusion Continues: Advertising, Public Relations, and Marketing

The term marketing as stated earlier is an overarching topic in which includes the aspect of promotion. In many research and text books, public relations and advertising will be placed together in the promotion category (Brierly, 2002; Smith, 1996;). These tend to be more marketing and advertising driven than public relations minded. Public relations managers in general try to separate themselves from the marketing function of an organization (Harris, 1993; Smith, 1996).

Wragg (1992) recognizes that part of the problem with the distinction being made between public relations and advertising/marketing is the fact that the marketing department many times ignores the fact the public relations can be used to help promote the introduction of a product. When public relations is not ignored by the marketing department, it is used as a way to access and form media relations, even though there is much more that public relations can accomplish. With the media, public relations is seen as giving corporations mention in trustworthy editorial coverage (Brierly 2002).

Differentiation

Marketing departments should realize that public relations can help them beyond their aim at gaining sales. Public relations can help to build relationships with clients, but also foster healthy relationships within a corporation to achieve long-term goals (Grates, 2003). There are benefits with public relations departments beyond getting free publicity

for a product in the media. It should also be taken into account that public relations will be at the forefront of the lines when there is a crisis in the organization (Wragg, 1992).

Therefore, the public relations managers must be a part of the entire process of product implementation, and not an afterthought of the marketing department. Overall, public relations should be seen as more concerned with activities that promote corporate image, where marketing is more concerned with achieving sales (Wragg, 1992; Black, Sharpe, 1983). This dissimilarity is why public relations shies away from being associated with marketing.

Advertising is thought of as the first and foremost function of the promotion put into effect through marketing. This is partly due to the fact that all public relations events are considered “free advertising” because advertising promotes a product through paid media whereas public relations promotes a product through free sources such as press releases to news organizations (Smith, 1996; Black, Sharpe, 1983). Public relations is not “free advertising.” It has many more functions than getting a product or service into the news. But, it is noteworthy to understand the paid difference between advertising and public relations. This demonstrates the difference in their ultimate goals with a product launch or other goal of the company’s promotional materials. The next step is to integrate these two concepts with the emergence of integrated marketing communications (IMC).

Integration

IMC is the major communications/marketing development in the 20th Century. “It attempts to combine, integrate, and synergize different elements of communications mix, as the strength of one are used to offset the weaknesses of others” (Kitchen, 1995,

pp. 72). Doing this allows a company to consolidate all of its communication efforts to “to present an individual, focused, marketing, sales, or image message” (Smith, 1996, pp. 3). This last statement demonstrates where one of the problems lies with IMC, which is the one that will be focused on in this research.

The various communication departments within an organization had for years operated autonomously and integration of them was a thought, but never acted upon (Kitchen, 2005). This development in the field causes public relations managers to fear the encroachment of marketing (Harris, 1993). All communications would now have the same goal, which public relations often does not share with marketing. The division between these departments is causing IMC to have difficulties diffusing through corporations, even though there is research (Kitchen, 2005) that shows its positive impact on campaign effectiveness.

Resulting Research Question

From this research it seems that a term like ‘viral marketing’ would cause strife in a public relations department. Advertising and marketing have embraced this new technique to reach consumers who are ignoring traditional advertising efforts. Public relations must evolve their strategies to be able to continue to have effects on their publics. Viral marketing is one way to accomplish such goal, but with the schism between marketing and public relations that practitioners try to maintain, it could be seen as an impossible endeavor.

There is a reason that the name and the techniques are being studied because public relations could alter the concept slightly so it fits better into their realm of work. When the question refers to the title, it means the actual name of viral marketing.

Preliminary research has shown that public relations professionals are changing the name of viral marketing. These name changes all point to the fact that public relations may not be extremely willing to accept viral marketing as one of their promotional tools. It is not hard to imagine that in these times of constantly changing technology, that something that relies on that technology like viral marketing would also need to evolve. The new ways that professionals can utilize social networks will be researched.

It is these new techniques that will also give a clue into how public relations is using viral marketing. When viral marketing was first presented into the advertising world, it was thought that it would only be successful using e-mail as a means to reach millions of people. Now, there are specific social networking sites that can be employed, and this research will discover what else is out there that is being used in terms of viral marketing.

One of the most important aspects of this research question is the adoption of viral marketing into the public relations industry. Adoption includes all the ways in which public relations professionals recognize that they are doing a viral activity. Viral activity is simply the exploit of social networks to pass along a promotional/advertising message. Since, as discussed earlier, public relations likes to separate itself from advertising and marketing, it is important to know when and how they are integrating viral marketing into their business practices. It will give an insight into the world of viral marketing and understand the changes that it has undergone in its eleven years of existence.

All of this research leads to the question:

How has viral marketing diffused through the public relations industry and in what ways in terms of technique and name has viral marketing changed to influence its adoption?

[4] METHODOLOGY

Textual and Thematic Analysis

In order to perform this research, a textual thematic analysis was performed. The best way to discover if adoption has occurred in this research is to see if the trade journals are discussing the innovation. Therefore, a textual analysis of articles related to viral marketing was performed. From that analysis, themes were found to show ways in which viral marketing has been integrated in the public relations industry. Since there is no past research done on this topic, this research will be the base for many future studies. Because of this, the combination method used was created to be able to get a full understanding of this unexplored topic. Starting with textual analysis to set a base framework for the thematic analysis that then took place.

Textual analysis was used over a content analysis because at this point, there was nothing to quantify yet. The big picture needed to be looked at first. Textual analysis allows for the text to be taken apart and then relate each of the parts to one another (Berger, 1995). Discovering overall trends in the business was the ultimate goal, and content analysis would not adequately accomplish the researcher's intentions. Since a quantitative content analysis did not take place, this can be seen as a qualitative content analysis, insofar as the researcher did, to an extent, coding. But, no statistical tests on the data were performed.

Instead, the texts were looked at as a whole and allowed for a richer comparison between them (Berger, 1995). In this research, the base of the texts was the trade

journals themselves. While they were analyzed as a whole, as some textual analysis literature calls for, the researcher used Berger's (1995) classification method and focusing on specific articles that deal directly with the topic at hand.

Also, these journals were analyzed according to their content and meaning, not the structure (Fairclough, 1992). For this research, the way that the journals presented the text was not as important as what they said in them. Textual analysis allows the researcher to truly examine the way that the words are presented to the readers (Fairclough, 1992). The language used in the articles gave a clue into how the practitioners felt about viral marketing and its adoption. With this method, there were a variety of ways in which the researcher could use the text to lend itself to the next step of research. Prior (2004) states that before the research starts, the angle the text is going to be analyzed from must be decided. For this research, the text was examined in relation to the way that the practitioners are affected by this innovation. It discovered how this innovation has impacted the industry. It then allowed for the trends dealing with the innovation to be discovered.

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis was performed after the textual analysis. The themes were then extracted from that initial analysis. "Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon" (Fereday, Muir-Cochran, 2006, pp. 3). The phenomenon that was being dealt with for this research was the diffusion of this innovation. When performing a thematic analysis, careful reading and rereading of the text is important to uncover the patterns in the data (Fereday, Muir-

Cochran, 2006). This allows for proper categories of analysis to emerge. For this study, the researcher categorized the trends in public relations that dealt with viral marketing.

Thematic analysis generally occurs after interviews or ethnographic studies as a way to uncover the true feelings of people's experiences (Arson, 1994). Using textual analysis did allow for a social aspect of these industries to be explored and can therefore lent itself to then be analyzed thematically. Arson (1994) explains thematic analysis as a way to focus "on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behavior" (pp. 1). For this research the patterns of living and behavior translated into industry trends. A part of thematic analysis is to have already classified patterns, and this was done through the textual analysis.

Once the content was separated into those categories, the data had to be combined and resorted to fit into sub-themes (Arson, 1994). In the discussion, these themes will be justified from the researcher's perspective in order to give readers a better understanding of why what was pulled out of the data was considered important. All of this lead to how viral marketing is being used in public relations, which was the ultimate goal.

Limitations

A slight problem with using textual and thematic analysis was the subjective nature of them. Since texts can carry a lot of meaning, different people can interpret the information different ways (Berger, 1995). It is known that qualitative research cannot be generalized (Stacks, 2002), and the same will be true for this research. It could be possible that if another person tried to replicate the findings, their interpretation would differ. For such preliminary work in this area though, that is acceptable. This is the beginning to future research dealing with the diffusion of viral marketing. It is

imperative that this initial stage is completed for academics and practitioners as a foundation for future studies. It will show where viral marketing is headed in the industry, which is beneficial for practitioners planning on using the technique.

What Texts Were Studied

In order to understand the diffusion of viral marketing in the public relations industry, it was helpful to also comprehend how it diffused into the advertising industry. This gave different perspectives to the concept in general, and the way in which it is being used in relation to the two industries. Since viral marketing started as an advertising concept, seeing how they started using it and continue to use it was beneficial for understanding the same in public relations. Therefore, this study performed a comparison of trade journals from both professions.

The two trade journals from the advertising profession used were *Advertising Age* and *AdWeek*. Both provided for coverage on issues affecting the advertising world. This included company changes, brand extensions, and new technologies affecting the industry. Viral marketing and the campaigns that have used this strategy have all been covered in these two publications. To counteract those two publications, *PRWeek* and *PR News* were used to discover what public relations was saying about viral marketing. Like the advertising publications, these looked at the trends occurring in the industry.

These four publications were chosen because they are highly reputable throughout the industries. The researcher needed publications that were seen as credible. The stories that were analyzed needed to be found as trustworthy by professionals in order to get a robust view of what was happening in the industries. The readership of each journal is high and each state that they are one of the most read in the field. They offer information

dealing with changes in the field and new strategies being implemented. Also, since they were available online, they offered more than the print publications including blogs, which can also contain information regarding viral marketing. Each was also updated daily or weekly which showed that they are staying on top of the industry trends.

Finding Articles and Selecting Population

Two journals from each industry were chosen in order to have a broader and more in depth understanding of how the professionals perceive and use viral marketing. In order to make sound conclusions for this research all the articles that discuss viral marketing beginning with its advent in 1997 until December 2007 were to be read. While ten years was a large span to work with, it was necessary in order to discover the adoption or lack of adoption that has occurred. In actuality though, articles in the advertising journals began in the year 1998, and the public relations journals began in 2000. The researcher gathered articles from those years until 2007 still.

To lessen the burden, the online archives for each were utilized. The first keyword used was “viral marketing.” This brought up the most useful results for analysis. When searching “viral marketing” with the advertising journals, 859 articles were produced. The researcher felt that this was an adequate amount to get a sample for analysis. For the public relations articles, the word “viral marketing” did not generate nearly as many results. Therefore, the researcher needed to look at what else was happening in the industry in order to see what other keywords would need to be used. The terms “social media” and “web 2.0” were also used for the search. Using these allowed for a total number of articles that was acceptable to then get a sample. The total number of article was 388.

Other terms were not used because the researcher wanted to be sure that the campaigns and techniques discussed centered around the Internet as is the true definition of viral marketing. Those terms were also not searched within the advertising articles because there would have been too many articles. This would have caused a large discrepancy with the amount of articles compared to public relations, which would then have caused a difference in the amount of articles needed for a sample between the industries. There were also limitations with time, and too many articles would have posed a problem for the researcher.

Since a vast amount of articles was produced between the four publications, a random number table was used. Actually, two random number tables were used. The first table moved from *Handbook of Research Methods: A Guide for Practitioners and Students in the Social Sciences* (Sproull 1988) was not large enough to get 100 samples from the public relations articles. For public relations, a larger random numbers table was from University of Minnesota Morris (Sungur). This allowed for an unbiased selection of 200 articles. Each article had an equal chance of being selected and used for the population (Stacks, 2002). The 200 articles were split 100 advertising and 100 public relations. This random sample let the researcher have a workable number of articles and gave assurance for a representative look at what the trade journals were saying on this topic.

What Was Looked For

Since this research ultimately would like to see the themes that emerge from the textual analysis, it is slightly different than a true textual analysis study. Therefore, there was not a concrete set of codes that were used when looking at each article. What

occurred was that the codes set a guideline for how to discover the themes that materialized. The codes were based on the themes that the researcher discovered, but only once the research was completed were the themes actually known. The reason that themes were used was because they will indicate the trends occurring in the industries. Knowing the trends show how viral marketing was being diffused into public relations, and how well. It was ultimately the trends that needed to be extracted from all this research.

With textual analysis, the big picture was looked at. This let the researcher to get a full understanding of the meaning behind each article and the implications for viral marketing in the public relations industry. When analyzing the articles, full sentences were pulled out as examples to show what was being said about the topic. Doing this permitted the researcher to have a richer discussion applying theory to practice. There are several propositions that the researcher has that guided the research being done.

Those are:

1. Advertising started the viral marketing movement, and now public relations is picking up the method and the trade journals will concur. Therefore, it will seem as if public relations is a laggard.
2. Public relations is opposed to being connected with marketing and advertising, so it is proposed that there will be changes to the name.
3. Viral marketing started with the Internet; therefore it may always be fueled by a change in technology.
 - a. This includes a move from e-mail to social networking sites and cell phone usage.
 - b. There be a discussion between professionals, some that believe that the message is still most important, and others that think technology pushes the campaign.
4. Public relations may be more likely than advertising to rely on other media to bolster the viral marketing campaigns.
5. As time progresses, the more viral campaigns will be implemented.

6. It is thought that public relations practitioners may find viral marketing to have relative advantage and low complexity, but attachment of “marketing” to the name will deter usage.

These topics allowed for the trends to then be pulled out when the thematic analysis was completed. These trends answered the research question proposed.

Analysis

The guidelines set by the coding sheet let the researcher place the articles into categories according to the topic. Since unlike a content analysis, there was no quantifying, what was done instead was a grouping of trends. The articles were read in a way that looks for where they fall within the preset categories. By separating articles into trends, the thematic analysis could then take place. The thematic analysis looked at each of the broad categories set by the textual analysis and then pulled more specific themes from those. The themes gave a better picture of what was happening to viral marketing.

The themes found in advertising were compared to what was found in public relations. This allowed the researcher to see how different the two industries handle viral marketing, which in turn showed the diffusion it has gone through in public relations. The propositions guided the analysis and were repeatedly referred to in order to be sure that the theory was interrelated to the discussion. The theory was the framework for this entire thesis, and in the end it showed the importance of this study in an academic and practical perspective.

[5] RESULTS

With the rise of the Internet, much of the advertising and public relations world is now focusing on tactics to reach audiences through this medium. The research performed looked into this phenomenon, with a focus on the public relations industry. Public relations is adopting viral marketing into the profession, but they are making changes to the name, and the techniques that are being used. There is a focus on the social aspect of viral marketing using such methods as blog and social networking sites. The comparison of articles and the wording that was used to describe these new techniques shows the divide between the two industries. Public relations is adopting new media tools, but at a much slower rate than advertising. There is much that public relations professionals can learn by looking at the ways advertising is harnessing viral marketing.

What was found supported most of the propositions set forth by the researcher.

Those propositions were:

1. Advertising started the viral marketing movement, and now public relations is picking up the method and the trade journals will concur. Therefore, it will seem as if public relations is a laggard.
2. Public relations is opposed to being connected with marketing and advertising, so it is proposed that there will be changes to the name.
3. Viral marketing started with the Internet; therefore it may always be fueled by a change in technology.
 - a. This includes a move from e-mail to social networking sites and cell phone usage.
 - b. There be a discussion between professionals, some that believe that the message is still most important, and others that think technology pushes the campaign.
4. Public relations may be more likely than advertising to rely on other media to bolster the viral marketing campaigns.

5. As time progresses, the more viral campaigns will be implemented.
6. It is thought that public relations practitioners may find viral marketing to have relative advantage and low complexity, but attachment of “marketing” to the name will deter usage.

Beyond the propositions, other trends with the changing nature of viral marketing were found. All of these, including the proposition findings, are delineated in the following table.

TABLE i, Propositions

FINDING	PUBLIC RELATIONS	ADVERTISING
Proposition 1	Laggards; Articles focus on “how-to” instead of what is being done in industry	Early Adopters; Articles focus on campaigns and techniques used by professionals
Proposition 2	Uses terms “new media,” “social media,” and “web 2.0” or “PR 2.0” more than “viral marketing;” When using term “viral marketing” articles relate back to the marketing industry instead of public relations	Uses terms “viral marketing,” “new media,” and “social media”
Proposition 3	Change is fueled by technology and audiences, mobile phones are the newest ways to reach audiences virally; Audiences are now in control and plans revolve around that	Same
Proposition 4	Relies on traditional means to supplement viral campaigns, partly due to loyalty to tradition and weariness of Internet	The same is seen, but still has less emphasis on the traditional
Proposition 5	More campaigns are implemented with each year; Award show categories show progression of campaigns into agencies	Has implemented more campaigns than public relations from the beginning, and continues to do so in 2007; Same with award shows
Proposition 6	Sees relative advantage with viral marketing including reaching a younger audience, But there is a higher complexity with viral marketing due to the name and its connection to the marketing industry and its nontraditional techniques, Must start integrated communication campaigns	Understands how public relations can utilize viral marketing for their benefit

TABLE ii, Other Findings

FINDING	PUBLIC RELATIONS	ADVERTISING
1. Maintaining Consistent Strategy and the Big Idea	Lacks understanding of the big picture for campaigns, must look to advertising to see how to better implement multi-faceted campaigns	Knows that a single funny idea is no longer enough to carry a campaign, with many opportunities with viral, big ideas are needed to create longstanding and evolving campaigns
2. Understanding the Audience and Building Relationship with Brand & A New Way of Thinking: Consumer Generated Content	Can learn from advertising here; Must give control to consumers and let them become the marketers; Build relationship between brand and consumers to create brand ambassadors	Knows the importance of understanding the audience and matching their desires with the message as well as the medium to reach them; Encourages user generated content to continue marketing message
3. Corporate Reputation	Proliferation of social communities allows consumers to talk more, and negative press spreads as quickly as a funny viral video; Professionals must build a relationship to mitigate the negative posts on blogs and social networking sites; cannot ignore the negative, must become a part of the conversation	Understands how public relations can use viral means to help with crisis and reputation management
4. Measurement	Confusion with the Internet and new techniques makes it difficult to report effectiveness to clients; Starting to create programs that will measure all aspects of viral, but social networking still a problem	Same

PROPOSTION FINDINGS, See Table i

Proposition 1:

Advertising started the viral marketing movement, and now public relations is picking up the method and the trade journals will concur. Therefore, it will seem as if public relations is a laggard.

Public relations professionals are laggards in relation to the adoption of viral marketing. Looking at the four trade journals, it was clear that public relations is just

now beginning to understand the importance of following audiences online. The sheer volume of articles produced by the two advertising journals far surpassed those produced by the public relations journals. It was also noted that the public relations journals had most results in the year 2007 and none past the year 2000. Even with the advertising journals, there was a more substantial amount in the year 2007 than any other year. These journals had articles related to viral marketing from the year 1998 forward.

Still in the year 2007, public relations practitioners are weary of changing the ways in which they reach audiences and achieve their ultimate goals. "...The rise of social media and digital PR [is] the end of their function as they [public relations professionals] know it" ("The Sky is Falling...", 2007). They are trying to embrace the changes in the industry in order stay with the trends that their counterparts are implementing. A study performed in 2006 discovered that there was an "increase in PR 2.0, or the 'adoption of Web 2.0 tools (blogs, podcasts and RSS feeds) to distribute a PR message,' but acknowledges the still-slow adoption of the term-and practice- in the communications industry" ("Quick Study...", 2006).

Keeping Up with News Outlets

The importance of using these web 2.0 methods goes beyond keeping up with competition. News outlets that public relations practitioners send press releases to are also changing. "Brands2Life's head of new media says PR practitioners need to catch up with the way news is generated and reported" ("Journalists are Working...", 2007). It is no longer good enough to send plain text press releases to these sources. They are now looking for videos, pictures, html links and social media news releases (O'Connor, 2007).

Journalists are now looking to blogs to get their news, especially with the rise of online news. "...44 per cent say they get stories from blogs. PR people need to take the medium more seriously by writing their own blogs- assuming they have something interesting to say- or by nurturing relationships with prominent bloggers" ("Journalist are Working...", 2007).

Public Relations Focus on How-To

Another phenomenon that is now occurring in the public relations industry that demonstrates that lagging, is the amount of articles dedicated to tips for using new media as well as seminars dedicated solely to the use of new media. In the advertising journals, this was not found nearly as much. There were some articles that had tips, but most articles dealt with the campaigns that were successful and the ways in which other advertisers were using the techniques. The public relations professionals could find articles explaining how to best find audiences and use blogs, definitions of technological words being used with these new media tools, and the interaction of social media and company reputation, etc (Verdino, 2007; Weisman, 2007; "How To...", 2007; "The Sky is Falling!...", 2007).

PR News offers "webinars" for professionals with topics including: how to measure integrated marketing efforts, managing digital reputation, and word of mouth marketing and PR, etc ("PR Measuring Track...", 2007; "Digital PR Track...", 2006). Other companies are offering similar seminars to show the benefits of social media in public relations. This allows public relations professionals to understand why they need to adopt these techniques, but also how they can approach skeptical clients who are also hesitant to use new media tools ("Louis Paul & Partners...", 2007). For public relations

practitioners, the articles tote the importance of moving to the future with new media. Once the public relations industry understands this, they can integrate these tools into their campaigns and show their clients how successful they can be.

Proposition 2:

Public relations is opposed to being connected with marketing and advertising, so it is proposed that there will be changes to the name.

Public relations does use different terms like social media and web 2.0 instead of viral marketing. The opposition of being attached to advertising, but mostly marketing is apparent and will be discussed later. That opposition did make for a change in wording by public relations professionals when discussing new media techniques. It should be noted that viral marketing is evolving, but what advertising professionals considered viral is what public relations professionals were renaming. But, viral marketing in the traditional sense, which was discussed in previous literature, was not as prevalent in public relations as it was in advertising. With name changes come modifications to the technique.

Name Changes

New media is one of the most common ways that all forms of viral marketing are grouped. In general, new media describes efforts performed on the Internet. Professionals first need to be convinced to use the Internet, and then join the communities in which their audiences participate. Other forms of new media exist, but the most prevalent is the use of wireless mobile phone technology.

From new media comes two other terms that are widely used in the public relations journals. Social media describes the media used when audiences interact with each other and with a brand or product. This is social networking essentially. When the

term social media is used, it describes social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, as well as blogs, and other interfaces in which people share information with each other (“What I Learned About...,” 2007). Blogs are of particular interest to public relations professionals. This is a forum where consumers can control content and professionals must be attentive to what is being said about their brands. Advertising professionals are also starting to use the term “social” when talking about viral campaigns. Josh Warner, president of The Feed Company, which has produced many successful viral campaigns will use the word viral, but says he prefers the term “social” (Solman, 2007).

Another term that public relations uses, but not one that advertising does is web 2.0. This refers to blogs, podcasts, and RSS feeds that can be used to distribute messages (“Quick Study...,” 2006). Web 2.0 encompasses social media, and it used slightly more broadly than the former.

There is no real consensus between professionals for these definitions though. All the articles did not address or use the terms in the same fashion. These terms were used broadly and interchangeably. Viral marketing was not commonly used, but the techniques were discussed often.

Distance with Techniques

Also, what was found was a separation of public relations and these new media techniques. For instance, a new campaign implemented by ClickBank includes, “a local and national public relations campaign, internal strategic communications, and new media practices and implementations” (“E-Commerce Retailer...,” 2007). This is entire plan was being implemented by one public relations agency. So, even with name

changes, public relations would still prefer a dichotomy between a public relations campaign and new media practices.

Proposition 6:

It is thought that public relations practitioners may find viral marketing to have relative advantage and low complexity, but attachment of “marketing” to the name will deter usage.

Public relations does see the relative advantage of viral marketing, but the technique still seems to have a high complexity. Part of the complexity is that the name does not match the goals of public relations. The public relations industry is reluctant to proceed with viral marketing because they do not want to be associated with the marketing industry.

High Complexity

Distinctions were made by public relations professionals in the articles to make a point that they were not marketers. They wanted to make it clear that public relations is a completely different industry and are looking for a different end result for the client. The article “Rise of New Media and Integrated Marketing Challenge Measurement” (2007), discriminates the two by stating that public relations executives manage the brand and marketers are more product/sales-centric.

One of the most difficult things for public relations managers to realize and overcome is that viral marketing is just a name. It is simply what Jurveston decided to call this method.

“Says Peter Verrengia, President of Communication Consulting Worldwide, a global business unit of Fleishman-Hillard, ‘PR people need to be careful that they don’t spend so much time defending the label of their activities that they miss an opportunity’” (“Rise of New Media...,” 2007).

Another problem for public relations is their hold on tradition. As discussed in Propositions 1, 2 and 4, public relations does not favor the techniques required for viral marketing. Public relations has to think beyond simple press releases and other non-Internet based ways of creating buzz. The professionals can now use blogs and social networking sites to give consumers more of a chance to talk about the brand. This technique is discussed further in other findings. Thinking in a more marketing manner is what public relations must do to better adopt viral marketing.

Integrated Communications

It is more important than ever for public relations and marketing to start to integrate. Public relations professionals must get past the narrow mindset that the two industries must be separate. In order to effectively reach audiences, all efforts must have a single strategic plan and use the new media to gain attention.

Eisen Management Group is one agency that understands this. They were hired by Applegate Media Group to “create, direct and strategically implement a fully integrated national public relations and branding campaign to showcase [a] fresh perspective” (“Eisen Management Group Adds...,” 2007). They are going to introduce an interactive website, viral marketing program, publicity and media relations strategy, a new brand identity, literature and collateral. Eisen Management Group president, Rodger Roeser understands, “This isn’t a marketing initiative, this is a corporate initiative by Applegate Media Group” (“Eisen Management Group Adds...,” 2007).

Public relations managers are now realizing that in order to produce a truly successful campaign for their clients they must have an integrated communications

campaign. There needs to be cooperation between marketers and those in the public relations field. The name should not be a hindrance to the adoption of these new methods, and finally in 2007, public relation professionals started to realize this.

“...In terms of PR executives who resist camaraderie, companionship or cohabitation with marketers: Embrace it, because its everyone’s highest good. Choosing to ignore it is the equivalent of being your own worst nightmare” (“Rise of New Media...,” 2007).

Viral Marketing Produces Buzz

Another fact that public relations professionals need to comprehend is that viral marketing produces the results that public relations campaigns strive for. Viral marketing creates buzz, the exact point of public relations. It allows consumers to spread the word about the product or brand. The consumer becomes the marketer. “Despite its name, VM [viral marketing] should be considered as public relations” (Cowlett, 2001). Viral marketing allows public relation professionals and advertisers to have subtle messages sent to their targeted audiences, and allows them to create relationships between consumers and brands. A game that provides interaction with the brand and provides an entertainment outlet that is then passed on to a friend is something that traditional media cannot provide. Simon Beales, manager of agency, Minds Eye says, “That’s true relationship marketing” (Cowlett, 2001).

Benefits of Viral are Relative Advantage

This being said, public relations is starting to realize the benefits of viral marketing. There is a relative advantage compared to traditional media. Many of the articles toted that new media was the best way to reach the younger audience and have a

conversation with consumers (Hall, 2006; “Brands Tap Into...,” 2004; “Industry Pioneer Launches...,” 2007) . This relative advantage is in conjunction with the integrated marketing capabilities. The chance to reach audiences that ignore the traditional means of outreach is something that public relations professionals are just starting to understand and take advantage of. There is now a way to reach a young audience, although it is not limited to that segment, through inexpensive means.

It must be noted that public relations professionals can also use these means for internal relations within a corporation. These new means of communication allow for greater engagement with employees. What public relations professionals must remember, which is different from advertising, is that brand reputation and image starts with the employees. Happy employees will relate to a better brand image in the eyes of the consumer. Matt Gonring, a consultant with Gagen McDonlad carried out a study and “inextricably link[ed] employee engagement to customer loyalty” (“Always Low Prices...,” 2007). Public Relations agency, O2, is now trying to engage their employees in new ways using web 2.0 technologies. This shows the company’s “commitment to its employees” (Marriott, 2007).

Proposition 3:

Viral marketing started with the Internet; therefore it may always be fueled by a change in technology.

This includes a move from e-mail to social networking sites and cell phone usage.

There will be a discussion between professionals, some that believe that the message is still most important, and others that think technology pushes the campaign.

Viral marketing is an evolving technique. The research found that technology and the audience fuel that change. There was no discussion of message versus technology. There seemed to be a consensus that technology is fueling the changes in messages,

which will be discussed with the big idea later. Viral marketing started with simple e-mails with requests to send to friends (Gunn, 2000). Now, there are a myriad of possibilities to reach consumers in a subtle, yet entertaining way. Technology changes have partly fueled these modifications. With e-mail being able to support more hypertext and media rich formats, even the simplest form of viral has gotten more advanced.

Technology Change: Use of Mobile Phones

One technology that is really changing social media is the mobile phone. Text messages were the first way in which marketers reached out to their consumers. Specialized messages were sent to consumers based on their interests (Morrissey, 2005). From that they saw the potential to bring the viral aspect to mobile phones. A connection is also occurring between wired Internet users and mobile phones. There are many campaigns, like the “Snakes On A Plane” campaign, where friends could prank each other with personalized recorded messages sent to their mobile phones. For “Snakes On A Plane,” Samuel L. Jackson’s voice was sent to voicemails around the nation (Cuneo, 2006).

Phones can also support highly advanced technology including videos. The phones are now a platform for social media (High, 2007). Videos, like movie trailers and music videos, are sent with high frequency to cell phones, and the entertainment value of those make them highly passable to their friends. Other capabilities that cell phones provide professionals, as well as consumers, is the ability to have mobile communities, like MySpace, but accessed solely on a mobile phone (High, 2007). Mobile social marketing is an area where public relations can learn from advertising.

Change Due to Audiences

The other part of the viral marketing evolution is the target audience. Cindy Tripp of Proctor & Gamble media and marketing goes so far to say, “It’s not about media, it’s about the consumer. When you put the consumer at the center, you’re going to get a very different communications plan...” (Neff, Sanders, 2004). Professionals in both industries must follow their audiences. Consumers are moving to the Internet for their media consumption, therefore campaigns must move to the Internet to have an effect. Consumers are creating their own online communities and social networking sites. This allows professionals to have a two-way communication with them. There is a need to join them to have this conversation with them. These online communities also show the shift in viral marketing from strictly viral e-mail to social networking.

Proposition 4:

Public relations may be more likely than advertising to rely on other media to bolster the viral marketing campaigns.

Public relations relies on traditional means slightly more than advertising in part because the industry as a whole is still weary of using the Internet. Traditional means are not dying in either industry though. While there is a shift occurring, and many campaigns are being moved to the Internet, they are being supplemented with traditional methods. It is actually rare that a viral campaign can be successful without any help from other sources (Melillo, 2007).

Examples with Off-Line Support

When Xerox wanted to change its image with a new product line, they introduced new media into their budget, which included viral videos. This was not all they did though. Their director of global advertising, Barbara Basney stated that their online

spending was actually only increasing by 20 percent and that they were going to take a balanced approach to their advertising effort (Snyder Bulik, 2007).

There was one example that was put out solely on the web, which was the ElfYourself campaign by OfficeMax. It started with just 11 people “elfing” themselves that turned into 11 million people “elfing” themselves. While this was all started through viral means, traditional buzz helped to make it such a success. It was picked up by news outlets including USA Today, MSNBC, and Entertainment Weekly, as well as on a number of blogs (Stanely, 2007). The buzz created by the viral was enhanced by off-line discussion. It needs to be noted that this was a rare find in the articles. The rest of the viral campaigns discussed were supported by traditional means like commercials or billboards.

Proposition 5:

As time progresses, the more viral campaigns will be implemented.

As with all emerging technology, there is a natural progression towards changed and increased use. This was found with viral marketing. Advertising definitely implements more campaigns than public relations. The advertising articles described more campaigns than the public relations, which focused on more how-tos. Things are changing though, and it can be predicted that in the future there will be a general rise in viral marketing. Awards in both industries are showing stronger support for innovative new media campaigns than expensive traditional ones, as well as changing the whole structure of awards shows to reflect the change in the industries (“Cannes Must Broaden...,” 2007; Rogers, 2006; “IABC/Detroit Celebrates...,” 2007). These changes

implicate the future of the industries, as well as the amount of viral campaigns that will be produced.

OTHER FINDINGS, See Table ii

1. Maintaining Consistent Strategy and the Big Idea

There is much that public relations can learn from advertising. Where public relations lacks an understanding of social media, advertising has a firm grasp. When introducing a viral campaign, the point is to have a big idea. From that big idea, subsequent ideas flow for how to implement it. Todd Grant learned that, “Before [viral success] ... an idea has to be bigger than the page it’s written on” (2007). No longer can a creative simply make a funny commercial or viral video, there must be a solid idea.

David Droga, worldwide chief creative director at Publicis describes this change: “What was different was [creative] people weren’t saying, ‘I have to have something on TV.’ In the next year, you’ll hear more and more about alternatives: ‘Is it interesting? Is it effective?’ It’s become a legitimate strategic decision; it’s not just about migrating to another media because everyone else is doing it” (O’Leary, 2005). One great idea can create a plethora of opportunities, including user generated content, which shows the passion that consumers have for brands (Grant, 2007).

Integrated Campaigns

This point goes back to the integrated communications campaign that the public relations industry is reluctant to be a part of. Each element of an integrated campaign must have a strategy that is consistent. FedEx created a brand for itself with a core mission being “One Vision. One Voice,” which all of its communications revert back to.

It is something that “stakeholders can grasp and define with confidence” (“Lead, Follow Or Get...,” 2007). Message alignment is key.

Professionals must understand that in order for a campaign to be sustainable on the Internet, it must be multi-faceted and have the ability to have continued growth and evolution. One idea that can transcend media and time will be the most effective type. This allows for brand loyalty to be created within consumers.

2. Understanding the Audience and Building Relationship with Brand & A New Way of Thinking: Consumer Generated Content

The target audience for a product or brand is one of the most important things to understand when creating a viral campaign. In both types of journals, the audience was emphasized when using these new media techniques. It is the consumer that drives that campaign. One trend that the researcher found was that the consumer becomes the marketer. The consumer is in control of the message (“AdWeeks 2000...,” 1999; “Quick Tips,” 2007) Therefore, advertisers and public relations professionals must find the appropriate target audience and use the appropriate media to reach them (“Godfrey Offers Solution...,” 2007; Smethurst, 2006).

Targeting the Right Audience

This is why the younger audience is typically the target for viral videos. They have gravitated to the Internet for entertainment, news, and connecting with friends. Professionals must follow them in order to reach them because they are particularly opposed to mainstream marketing (Phillips, 2007). Viral marketing allows brands to be promoted in subtle, not overt ways. Consumers are more receptive to this because to them it seems as if they are in charge. They get to decide if they want to pass along that message to their friends (Bloom, 2007). It is this control that makes viral a success.

One point that was noted in previous research and continues to be a concern for professionals using viral is that the campaign must be appealing enough to be passed along. Incentives are one of the best techniques for catching consumer attention as well as earning the desired pass along effects. Incentives do not have to be physical items. Rex Briggs, CEO of Evolution Marketing says, “If you’re tapping into something that’s core and central, how people feel on their private side, that could give you a hook for getting into the social network” (Klaassen, 2007). If a viral attempt does not tap into any emotion, it is unlikely that it will be successful.

Viral marketing allows professionals to target a very specific audience with a tailored message (“Umbria Selected by...,” 2007; Mack, 2004; “Touch Point Marketing...,” 2007). Professionals can begin a successful campaign with knowing the consumer’s identity. Everything about their likes, dislikes, psychographics, media use and more need to be considered by the marketers. This allows the professionals to then “communicate the brand’s advantages in ways that are both relevant and resonant with individual customer identities” (“Touch Point Marketing...,” 2007).

Building Brand Relationships

Having a tailored message allows consumers to build a relationship with the brand. Relationship building is the most important concept and positive outcome for social networking (Klaassen, 2007). Social media allows professionals to engage consumers with the brand. Consumers can interact feely with it, particularly with games and social networks.

The better the relationship a consumer has with a brand, the more likely they are going spread buzz to friends (“Steve Jobs Rocks...,” 2007). Online communities are a

resource that professionals can tap into to build relationships and understand customers. There are now social networking sites that revolve around a particular topic or hobby. Tapping into these would be a simple and effective way for public relations professionals to reach a specific target audience (Morrissey, 2007).

Professionals must start listening to the consumers and becoming part of their conversations, and social media is a way to accomplish this (Hampp, 2007). By joining a preexisting social network, public relations professionals can create a dialogue with consumers. Clarifications can be made and trust can be built and maintained. Blogs are a medium in which this is particularly successful. By researching blogs, professionals can find the opinion leaders that are most likely to spread the brand's message. Finding people who are passionate about a topic related to your brand can become the best brand ambassadors for a company. "It's not you selling to them. It's you and them selling together" (Mullman, 2007).

Using Those Relationships

Once audiences are found, public relations managers, as well as advertisers, must then take the time to show their authenticity and engage the bloggers. Once a relationship is established, professionals can ask the bloggers to talk to other influencers about their brand or product. The relationship must be respected and continued past the product promotion (Weisman, 2007). This is a completely new way of thinking for the public relations industry. It is the way to follow and engage consumers, so it is a technique that can be successful if used properly.

These new relationships allow for a fresh perspective on brands. They become a part of consumers' lives like they have not in the past. Public relations professionals are

beginning to understand the importance of this. For example, Jaime Ernesto Uzeta joined BBMG to lead the expansion of the firm's integrated marketing capabilities. He was brought on because, "[His] focus on social media technologies, reflects the firm's commitment to bringing brands to life in ways that resonate with an increasingly tech-savvy marketplace that cares more and more about the triple bottom line: people, planet and profitability" ("Branding and Marketing...", 2007).

Lack of Control

There is a part of new media that is a little upsetting to public relations professionals and it is the potential for lack of control ("The Sky Is Falling!...", 2007;). This comes from user generated content which is a new development for viral marketing. Consumers can spread word about a brand through their own means, especially with videos and blogs. In the public relations industry, the old ways of doing things was that the agency had complete control over what buzz was created because it was restricted to traditional means.

Now, the industry is being turned on its head, and the professionals must adjust. Without giving up control though, professionals are sending a different message to consumers. They are telling the audience that the marketers know better what they want than they do (Morrissey, 2006). It is possible to mitigate bad press though. By joining in the conversation, professionals can gain back some control to safeguard against attacks. This content created by consumers must not be ignored though ("Bud Light, Oprah and Dave...", 2007). It is the true result of viral marketing, and by letting go of the reins, positive results can occur.

3. Corporate Reputation

Maintaining a positive corporate reputation is the main concern for public relations professionals. New media is challenging the way in which the industry handles this duty. With user generated content, the lack of control means that anything can be said about a brand. “Because control has shifted from the organization to constituents, and because the business climate is so volatile, reputation is the most precious and vulnerable thing a corporation can possess-not to mention one of the most intangible” (“Lead, Follow Or Get...,” 2007). Realizing this and how social media is transforming the industry, Morrissey & Compnay, a national reputation management and public relations agency, created a blog dedicated to this topic. Peter Morrissey describes this endeavor, “This blog will enable executives to make connections and exchange ideas that will help their organizations build trust and interact more positively with their audiences” (“Morrissey & Company...,” 2007).

Dealing with Blogs

Blogs are a particularly tricky social medium to mitigate and control reputation. When consumers are angry about a product they recently purchased, there is nothing to stop them from going to the web and writing a post on their own blog or a product review site about their terrible experience. Just as quickly as good news can spread, so can a negative message. Dell ran into such a situation. When Jeff Jarvis received poor customer service that he was entitled to, he wrote an angry blog entry that was picked up by national media in the US and the UK. It was reported that Dell saw a 42 percent loss in their value because of the entry (“Blogs Under Audit,” 2006).

Blogs completely change the way public relation managers handle crises. Mark Rogers, chief executive at Market Sentinel talks about blogs as, “They can be authoritative, but only if the company about whom they have an issue does not step up to the plate” (“Blogs Under Audit,” 2006). Therefore, the industry needs to counteract the negative buzz occurring, and one way to do that is to create a conversation and relationship with bloggers (“The Sky Is Falling!...,” 2007).

Responding to Negative Viral

Yum Brands learned their lesson when a viral video of rats running rampant through a New York KFC/Taco Bell restaurant. The company considered it an isolated event and did not believe it would become a national issue. They thought they only needed to take action against this one store and did nothing besides close it down. What happened was a video of the rats was distributed online and then picked up by news outlets. It was everywhere.

By midday, more than 1,000 blogs cited and spread the story and video and there were 600 stories posted on websites from Wyoming to the UK (Macarthur, 2007). This miscalculation by Yum Brands was detrimental. Public relations agencies can learn from this. Within the negative chatter, there must be positive conversation about the brand and reassurance for consumers. The industry cannot ignore the impact of social media; they must change their ways to keep up their brand reputation activities.

4. Measurement

A huge concern for advertising and public relations is the effectiveness of a campaign. Agencies have clients that they must report back to, and if they do not know what they should be measuring they cannot report success, or failure, back to their

clients. New media causes a conundrum when trying to know what measurements need to be taken. Viral marketing is more about performance than reach, as seen with traditional methods of evaluation (Solman, 2007). With so much user generated content, and pass along effects, it can be difficult to track a single campaign. It is almost impossible to track the amount of media that are effecting consumers' perception of the world, including the buzz and "talkability" of a brand campaign ("Measuring the Unmeasureable," 2005).

Multiple, Ambiguous Measures

Part of the problem lies in the fact that viral messages start on the Internet, which is still hard to measure in itself. It is difficult to find unique viewers of a video for example. Katie Paine, CEO of KDPaine & Partners says, "The real measure of social media is engagement" ("The Power of 1...", 2007). This is not a simple feat. It is clear that changes in the industries need to be made. Microsoft and Cymfony, a market influence analytics company, banded together to create a single number to measure a public relations campaign's effectiveness. The two companies wanted to simplify the multiple measures a campaign has into a simple algorithm ("The Power of 1...", 2007). This model is still in the beginning stages, and the creators admit that social media is creating a barrier for them that they are trying to overcome.

Sway, Inc, a leader in social media marketing, created a program called Shoutlet. This was a web 2.0 tool for all professionals which includes branding and communication tools to create, distribute and track, in real time, online campaigns ("Shoutlet Creates, Distributes...", 2007). This single program is a simple yet comprehensive way for professionals to embrace the changes occurring in the industry. Before this program,

multiple tools had to be used for strategies including, video distribution and text messaging with questionable tracking abilities (“Shoutlet Creates, Distributes...,” 2007). With the ability to track the social media campaigns, this program is what the future will bring to the industry. Agencies know that in order to convince their clients that new media is a viable option there needed to be a way to show them results. Steps are being taken in the right direction, but there are still hurdles to surmount.

[5] DISCUSSION

Public relations is heading into the new media world, and trends were found that show the continued reluctance to produce viral marketing campaigns. There are barriers to the adoption that the researcher recognized, and by looking towards other industries in communication, public relations can learn to better accept viral into their strategies. The researcher did discover a better reception to new media in general by public relations, and these methods are considered viral in advertising terms.

Public Relations as Laggards

The findings for Proposition 1 determined that the public relations industry is a laggard in the adoption of viral marketing. Public relations is just now implementing viral or social media campaigns into their repertoire of techniques. Laggards are in the latter part of the normal bell curve of adoption, meaning that they delayed using the innovation until they felt at ease doing so. Public relations waited until they saw what other industries were doing before starting to use the technique. Instead of trying to exercise these techniques when Jurveston first introduced them, public relations sat in the shadows. It did not seem necessary to them because their old ways of doing things were comfortable and seemed to be working. This oversight put public relations at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the communications industry, and made them weary of using social media, even now. Slowly, they are coming around.

In all communication industries, viral marketing is most likely still on an increasing curve. In the coming years, more and more campaigns will be implemented,

and the technique will not seem like a burden to use. It will become a natural selection when deciding which media to use with a brand campaign. Public relations is behind, but is now starting its ascent to the upward curve of the S, as created by Rogers. It is realizing that it needs to adopt this innovation in order to survive. With people ignoring traditional media, the industry must use new ways to reach audiences. Professionals must keep up with the trends, and right now, they are slightly behind advertising as well as consumers.

When determining where the industries or people adopting an innovation stand on the S curve, the process that was undergone to make that decision must be examined. When the public relations industry first heard about viral marketing, there was a process that they went through to determine that they would not follow that trend. Rogers says that individuals go through a mental process when first hearing about an innovation. A similar progression was done by public relations. They decided that viral marketing was too closely associated with the other industries, among other problems that are discussed in the next section, and therefore did not proceed with the adoption of viral marketing.

Problem with Adoption

Applying the diffusion of innovations theory suggests that public relations went through a five stage process as outlined by Rogers in 1962. Those stages include several decisions such as observing a problem, making an analysis of it, deciding the available courses of action, taking action, and then accepting the consequences of those decisions. Looking at this further, the public relations problem with adopting viral marketing can be applied.

The dilemma facing the industry is two-fold. One problem is that the counterparts of the communication industry, those being advertising and marketing, are moving on to new media. They started to move to the Internet with viral campaigns before public relations, as well as employ more campaigns. The second problem is that traditional means are no longer effective enough to reach audiences. Consumers are moving to the Internet for their news, entertainment, and communications means. They are also ignoring traditional media messages. Subtle messages are a better way to gain attention of consumers, and traditional gives overt messages that consumers do not appreciate.

Relative Advantage and High Complexity

To continue with the five stages, public relations had to then look at the advantages and disadvantages of viral marketing. One way to do this was to look at the relative advantage and the high complexity of the technique as noticed in the findings for Proposition 6. Public relations actually has more reluctance to accept these new media techniques than advertising which counteracts findings in previous studies dealing with the adoption of the Internet in these industries. With this current research, it is important to look closer into these two points to understand where public relations stands.

Relative Advantage

Viral marketing does have the advantage over straight traditional means. These campaigns are less overt and therefore better received. This was found in Proposition 6 and Other Findings 2. The consumers feel like they are in control. They are deciding whether to first watch, play or pay attention, and then whether they see the intrinsic value and want to pass it on to their friends. Putting consumers in control lets professionals listen to their consumers and see how they are interacting with the brand. Viral

marketing allows public relations professionals to build relationships with the consumers, which is a stronger way to build brand loyalists and ambassadors.

This technique also allows professionals to reach the audiences ignoring traditional media effectively. Social media is dominated by the young culture, but it is not solely a medium to reach the youth. With the specialization that is available on the Internet, it is possible to reach older audiences as well, and highly targeted audiences. No longer should public relations think about the mass media. New media provides a way to reach the exact audiences that they are looking for, and create specific messages and relationships for them. Understanding this was key in the findings for Proposition 3 and Other Findings 2.

High Complexity

The high complexity of viral marketing is a disadvantage in the eyes of public relations professionals. The industry is still trying to convince itself that social media is a viable method of message delivery. Other Findings 4 found measurement as a large setback in using the technique. Evaluation of the Internet in general is still a mystery; therefore measuring a social community on the Internet would cause even more problems. The current research also found that just using the Internet seemed like a hurdle to overcome for public relations. Many of the professionals did not want to relinquish their traditional methods.

It was found though, that in order for a viral campaign to be made aware of was to use traditional methods to promote it. In the findings for Proposition 4, the researcher realized that public relations professionals are trying to hold on to what they know instead of following trends in the communications industry. But, the most successful

campaigns were those that used off-line means to supplement the viral work. Therefore, public relations professionals should realize that they do not have to give up everything they trust to follow the target audience online.

The findings for Proposition 1 showed that the public relations industry was not ready to consistently use viral marketing because they did not know how. The amount of “how-to” articles demonstrated to the researcher that the industry needed guidance. Public relations professionals need to be shown that viral marketing is an alternative to traditional media and that it is possible to do.

By looking towards the advertising industry, public relations professionals could gain some understanding. Advertising understands that viral marketing allows for highly targeted audiences to receive entertaining messages that they will pass onto friends. The intrinsic value of messages can be the selling point. Therefore, the importance of understanding the target audience is something that cannot be overlooked. Again, advertising excels here as seen in the findings for Other Findings 2 and Proposition 3.

The attachment of marketing to the name is a hindrance to its use by public relations, which is a disadvantage to adoption. The data shows that public relations prefers to be thought of as a separate entity from advertising or marketing. The distance that public relations puts between itself and other communications industries will only make acceptance and use of social media an even more arduous task. Viral marketing is just a name, what should be the focus is the results it provides. One of the benefits of viral marketing is that it causes discussion about a brand. Essentially, it builds buzz. Public relations does just that. Therefore, there should not be an aversion to viral

marketing. It should be embraced as a way to enhance what public relations is already doing.

Importance of the Audience

Advertising recognizes that you must follow the target audiences. Other Findings 2 shows public relations professionals where they can learn from advertising professionals in relation to audiences. Continuing with the same practices will most likely result in, well nothing. The wrong audiences will most likely be reached and the message will be lost. Advertising professionals also realize that the right medium with the right audience is the most successful way to convey a message.

Viral marketing allows for this. There are more media that can be utilized to hit targets. For instance, younger generations are proficient at using mobile phone technology, and communicate incessantly with them as seen in Proposition 3. Knowing this, viral messages can be sent via phone to these target audiences. It is definitely a new way of thinking, but one that is necessary to continue to promote brands.

Public relations also has many publics in which it must answer to. These include customers, employees, shareholders, management, and more. These stakeholders give public relations the responsibility to perform many duties that advertising does not have. Viral marketing allows public relations professionals to connect with all their stakeholders and build quality relationships. It was found that social media was particularly helpful with was employees in Other Findings 3. CEOs and their employees are now able to have more open communications. This promotes employee satisfaction, which equates to customer satisfaction.

Integrated Communications Campaigns

The findings pointed to the fact that there must be integrated communications campaigns in order to have successful message communication with consumers. Like the barriers that were encountered with IMC in previous research, there is a hesitance to be associated with marketing when creating a single campaign. It is that umbrella of communications that needs to be opened in order to truly use viral marketing to its full potential. The ability to get past the division that the industries created could make communication campaigns that excel beyond expectations.

These types of campaigns will be another innovation that public relations must adopt into their industry. Like IMC, it is an idea that needs to be accepted by public relations before it can be successful. This is another area where the industry should not fall behind its counterparts. This is a way for them to better incorporate the other innovation, viral marketing into their strategies. If the three communications industries adopt these campaigns together, it will be equally beneficial.

The eventual integration of the communication industries will lead to more confusion when trying to define public relations or the others. The original problem with defining the industry may lie in the fact that many responsibilities that each industry performs actually overlap with another. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the three, so they should stop trying to do so. The trend now is to create new communications that has the desired effects for all. The combination will allow for an efficient way to reach audiences.

There could be a reluctance to create integrated communications campaigns because public relations professionals have different views of the end goal than their

counterparts. Public relations has more emotional values at stake. They are not necessarily looking to change purchase decisions, instead there is a need to strike an emotional cord with consumers about issues of public concern at times. Public relations professionals have a duty to gain trust with their audience and being connected with marketing messages could cause a breach of that. There is a delicacy that needs to be paid attention to when creating these integrated campaigns.

Changes in the Industry

With viral marketing, there is no longer a mass media. The highly specific targets allow for a much more fragmented audience. The messages no longer need to appeal large, homogeneous audiences. This not only changes what public relations is, but also, what advertising is. Advertising is most commonly defined as communicating through a mass medium (Richards, Curran, 2002). With the changing technology, the definitions are going to have to change. Along with that change, industry changes will also have to occur. Viral marketing may simply cause a change in role definition. But, change in the entire industry will most likely occur because new jobs will need to be created to fulfill social media needs.

Other transformations in the industry include more abstract modifications, like change in thinking. It may seem obvious, but the way in which communications professionals now think about brands and consumers has been completely turned around. No longer is it marketing to them, now it is marketing with them. Consumers become brand ambassadors and sell the products for the professionals. Allowing consumers to gain control is difficult for public relations in particular. This lack of control was

delineated in Proposition 6 and Other Findings 2, and seen as a set back for adopting viral marketing.

When it is ingrained in practitioners to sell to audiences, it is not easy to lose control and allow the consumers to do with the brand what they want. To gain some control back, the key is to build a trusting relationship with the consumers. It was seen in Propositions 2, 3 and 6 and Other Findings 2 and 3, social networks and blogs allow professionals to communicate directly with their consumers about brands, as well as discuss other concerns of the bloggers. This capability not only changes thinking, but also changes the structure of the industry.

This new way of thinking and loss of control can also be seen as a disadvantage to adopting the technique into the public relations industry, but should not be. The researcher found that the industry is now realizing that they need to let go and let consumers talk about and market brands with them. Proposition 6 and Other Findings 2 discerned that when consumers are in control they do not feel like they are being bombarded with marketing messages. They get to pick and choose what they pay attention to, and by listening to the consumer the right messages can be sent. This will allow for better reception and pass along by consumers. The personalization that viral marketing provides gives consumers a feeling of respect and loyalty toward a brand.

This slow realization puts public relations still behind advertising, but climbing the curve upwards. The researcher found in Proposition 5 that more and more campaigns are being implemented. In order to continue this trend, viral marketing needs to be understood and accepted by public relations even more. Those that use viral means are more respected in the industry because they are following the trends and consumers. It

was found that in awards, the viral campaigns are singled out more as exceptional work than great traditional campaigns. The industry is headed in the right direction, and all professionals should be ready to plan these campaigns.

Crisis Communications

A large question that has always been attached to public relations is, “Is bad press good press?” This plays even more heavily when viral marketing is introduced. Other Findings 3 showed that social media presents new problems for public relations trying to mitigate bad press. Now people have the power to discuss problems that they have with brands. Blogs give consumers forums to openly converse about how much they hate products or discuss bad experiences they have with them. These posts can be spread quickly and can get picked up by national media. The addition of video technology compounds the situation. By letting consumers create viral video commercials, there is a chance that not all the videos will be positive representations of the brand. That is a risk that professionals must take and decide if the positives outweigh the negatives.

Crisis communications now includes going to blogs and reassuring consumers who are talking. There is great harm that can occur throughout the Internet if companies do not stay on top of Internet chatter, and if they do not respond to the negative press it spreads more and hurts reputation. Now, and in the future more and more issues with viral marketing will arise. It was found in Other Findings 3 that being able to counteract the harm that can occur is really the only way to mitigate it. Putting the positive attributes of brands and reassurance that problems are being fixed into conversations seems to be the best way to do it. Even though these problems could be seen as too much

to deal with for public relations, it is something they cannot ignore, and therefore consequently must participate in social media.

Diffusion of Viral Marketing

When looking at the adoption of this innovation, viral marketing, it is apparent that public relations not only had to adopt this marketing concept, but also the techniques that departed from the norm. The acceptance of participating in a marketing fueled strategy was the first part of adoption for public relations. The industry needed to get past the division, that was seen in Proposition 1 and 6, it created and not only have a partnership with their marketing counterparts, but use this method of reaching audiences. It is still a hurdle being jumped, but acceptance is the first step. This relates back to the integrated communications campaign. Being able to create such a campaign will allow for an effective viral marketing effort. Overcoming this barrier they set for themselves allows public relations to adopt viral marketing into their methods easier and faster.

The other diffusion of innovation that public relations must complete to fully adopt viral marketing is adding Internet communications into their arsenal. The researcher found that there was some reluctance to even use the Internet instead of traditional means to reach stakeholders. This oversight leaves viral marketing out of the question. Public relations should realize that the Internet has the capabilities to not only reach audiences, but talk to them.

Blogs, social networking sites, and viral videos are all fairly new ways that define viral marketing. Proposition 2 revealed that not only are the names changing for viral marketing, but the techniques are too. These new ways to reach audiences should seem more appealing to public relations professionals because they create more buzz than a

viral e-mail. Therefore, these new techniques available for viral marketing fit better with the goals of public relations. This may allow for a quicker adoption of viral marketing into the public relations industry.

What it Means for Viral

This research made it clear that there is still confusion about how to define viral marketing. Public relations' disinclination to use the exact term viral marketing made the process of discovering its accepted definition even more difficult. The findings, particularly in Proposition 2, showed that now public relations is applying new terms to the technique of viral marketing, those being web 2.0 and social media. Advertising is also utilizing the term social media. Viral marketing is evolving, and now encompasses much more than just e-mail.

The new terms that are being applied to viral marketing are partly due to the new techniques available to create viral messages. The one that is most beneficial for public relations are social networking sites. Communities created online are conduits for brand talkability. There is the opportunity to connect with consumers and create long lasting relationships. The findings in Other Findings 2 noticed that the biggest trend in viral marketing is that it is moving to relationship marketing. There is now a need to have open communication with consumers. The same is true with blogs. Blogs can have a large following. Therefore, finding the opinion leaders in blogs can be helpful or detrimental to a campaign. This change in viral is fueled by the consumers. They are dictating where professionals must go to reach them, as seen in Proposition 3.

Monitoring blogs is important, as well as having open communication with them. These emerging technologies change the concept of viral marketing, and the natural

progression would then be a change in definition. Proposition 3 noticed that not only do the consumers change the ways in which viral is used, as seen above, but also the technology changes. It is the conjunction of the two as to why viral is changing so much. As technology moves further along, consumers follow the progressions; therefore professionals need to also. It seems to the researcher that because of this, there will be no agreed upon definition because of the evolving nature of technology. If the techniques are constantly changing, it cannot be expected to have a single definition of the practice. There needs to be acceptance of this, but there also needs to be a working definition so practitioners know what they are doing.

One thing about viral marketing that has not changed about viral marketing is the content. The most passed along messages were those that were emotionally charged. Looking at the findings for Proposition 6, 3 and Other Findings 2 the researcher found that incentives are encouraging for pass along, as well as matching the message to the consumer. In Other Findings 1, it was seen that if one big idea that can be created that grabs an audience, it will live longer and be passed along more.

The newer techniques are humorous and highly entertaining to encourage pass along. Personalization has made techniques that much more entertaining, like putting a friend's face on an elf and sending it to them. Messages must have an intrinsic value or they will be lost in cyberspace. Professionals need to understand the desires and motivations of their consumers to send the right message through these means.

Understanding why consumers will pass along a message is critical to viral marketing. The better relationship a consumer has with a brand, the more receptive they will be to a message related to that brand. They will also more likely pass it along to

those friends who also share that connection. Knowing all of this, the new social communities are essential to use for viral marketing. The relationships that professionals can build will give consumers a closer connection to the brand, and therefore they will accept and pass along a message. Viral marketing is so trendy that it seems it will always be changing. Right now, public relations practitioners must understand this and join their consumers online.

[6] CONCLUSION

Practicality of Research

The reason this present research is necessary lies in the lessons that public relations can learn and implement to make adoption of viral marketing that much easier. The data showed that understanding the audience is one of the most important aspects of viral marketing (“Umbria Selected by...,” 2007; Mack, 2004; “Touch Point Marketing...,” 2007; Klaassen, 2007). No longer do marketers dictate what consumers hear about brands. Becoming apart of consumers’ communities online is a way to not only listen to what they are saying, but be a part of that conversation.

There is an ability to build brand relationships to gain loyal consumers who become brand ambassadors. When public relations practitioners create this relationship, consumers feel that they are getting specialized attention. That is invaluable to a brand. In order to successfully do this, professionals must know what makes their target audience tick. The selling points of the brand must match the desires of the audience, they also must match how they reach that audience.

Knowing how to target the right audience with the right message and the right medium is something public relations practitioners need to comprehend. It is a main advantage of viral marketing. With new media, right now the younger audience dominates, as was seen by the present and past research. This is changing, but it seems that the best way to reach this audience is to utilize social media. By tailoring messages to the correct medium, effective campaigns can be produced (“Godfrey Offers

Solution...,” 2007; Smethurst, 2006). This demonstrates the added personalization that viral marketing allows. Personalization gives added credibility and respect for a brand. It also gives consumers a sense of the control they enjoy.

Keeping campaigns subtle is another advantage of viral marketing. The current research showed that consumers do not want to have marketing messages constantly thrown at them (Phillips, 2007). Therefore, by entertaining them with messages they do not feel as if they are being marketed to. There is also an opt-out option with viral marketing. They can choose whether they want to see the messages (Bloom, 2007). By allowing consumers to be the marketers, brands will be accepted more readily into their lives. This will also be likely to occur with the subtle quality of viral messages.

Creating the Big Idea

Another takeaway from this research is understanding that campaigns now are more about the big idea rather than one very creative idea that can only be used once. This is an area where advertising is excelling. They know that one great commercial is no longer enough to carry a campaign (Grant, 2007). The data showed that there has to be multi-faceted campaigns that allow for growth and improvement. The most successful campaigns will be those that allow for consumers to interact with the campaign and make new features for it. With the ability to expand, a campaign can last for much longer than a traditional campaign.

Viral marketing provides a new forum for promotional messages. A big idea can create the necessary buzz to keep it going (O’Leary, 2005). When the audiences are hit with campaigns that they can relate to and pass along to friends, the brand promotion will continue for much longer than with traditional means. No longer is it about seeing a

message in a predetermined media channel. Now, it is about being able to reach specific audiences through a variety of new media.

Marketing Connection

An obstacle that public relations must get through is being connected with marketing. The term viral marketing is simply that, a term. What is important to remember is that it is the technique that reaches audiences in new and effective ways, and an efficient way to keep up with trends. Being constantly connected with friends and family is a new phenomenon and one that will only get stronger. It is something that needs to be taken advantage of by public relations professionals.

The public relations industry should realize that the marketing industry is not a foe. If the two would combine forces, integrated communications could be created. The present research showed that having integrated campaigns, consumers and professionals will be better served (“Rise of New Media...,” 2007). Each industry has strengths and weaknesses that can be improved by the other. They must embrace each other to make it in the future.

Areas to Improve

Viral marketing is the future, but there are still aspects of the method that need to be developed further. One of the biggest problems facing viral marketing is measurement. Public relations professionals were quite concerned about how to relay effectiveness back to their clients. The problem lies in the fact that the essence of viral marketing lies with the Internet. The evasive nature of the Internet makes any form of marketing on it difficult to measure. A large question lies in how to know how many unique viewers have watched a viral video. Or, how many people have read a particular

blog entry (“Measuring the Unmeasurable,” 2005). A compounding problem is that more than one viral technique is employed for one campaign many times.

Companies are working on it right now. Programs are being created to implement campaigns and then track them to give accurate evaluations (“The Power of 1...,” 2007; “Shoutlet Creates, Distributes...,” 2007). These programs combine all the tools that an agency would use for one viral campaign. These will help with this problem, but do not include all the techniques like social networking sites. Practitioners need to try to resolve this issue. Buzz is not enough of a measurement since buzz does not always equate to sales or good brand reputation (Mullman, 2007, March 19). There is evidence of this with some of viral campaigns. Practitioners will have to decide what is most important to report back to clients.

Limitations

Obtaining the articles for this research was one of the biggest limitations to this type of research. It was assumed that all the articles would be accessible to the researcher, and this was untrue. The articles that were chosen were available through the university, but some of the articles that were compiled were only available online through the journals’ websites. This proved to be a stumbling block for the researcher. Some articles that should have been read were inaccessible, so the next random article had to be read instead. 200 articles from both industries were still read through. The next time this research is done, it may be better to get subscriptions to each of the articles to be sure that all articles can be read.

Another limitation was that only four articles were used. There were time limitations to this research, so a reasonable number of journals and articles needed to be

sampled. The results that this research produced cannot be generalized for all articles. The suggestions given are only suggestions from these four journals. Different outcomes may result from different articles. This research demonstrates trends happening in the industry in the writings of these four journals.

The general newness of this research also causes some problems. Not much previous research has been done on the topic, therefore there is not much support for the findings that this researcher found. Even the primary research that was done may not have been as robust as a similar topic about a tried and true method of message delivery. There was no other research paper done dealing with this particular topic, so the researcher had to develop a base for other research to be done on the topic. There are now possibilities for deeper evaluation of the adoption of viral marketing.

Future Research

The current research is the foundation for much more research to be done on viral marketing. This research set the base for what is currently being published by the industries. It demonstrates where they stand in relation to the progression of viral marketing. The next step would be to try to see how public relations is using the technique. Talking to professionals would be the best way to accomplish this. By having one on one interviews with those in the field working with the method the research in this field would have a better idea of how the industry feels using viral marketing.

The next step in this research is to see the motivations behind using the technique. Understanding this will give a clearer picture into why practitioners are increasing their use in the ways that they are. The current research gives an overview into why it may be necessary, but by speaking with professionals, personal as well as competitive reasons

may become apparent. In order to have the full picture of the evolution of viral marketing, it is necessary to see what the people performing these tasks think and feel.

After interviews occur, research could be done into future trends that will affect viral marketing. This would involve engaging the consumers. Focus groups or even more quantitative research could be done to see where they stand with viral marketing and where they accept marketing messages. Further research can then delve into the thoughts and behaviors of consumers and their interactions with viral marketing. Areas that can be explored include motivations to open and take the time to read, and then pass along to peers, and the ways in which the message was presented to them that they enjoyed and wanted to share among others. This could give an indication of where the field is heading.

Another aspect of content that should be explored involves the product types that are best suited for viral marketing to see how pervasive this method will be. The current research saw the beginnings of this. Entertainment services and brands targeted to the youth, like Burger King seemed to do the best, but other products were trying to get into the mix, like Xerox. Is it possible to change the image of a brand through viral marketing? Understanding the limits that consumers place on the way advertising for certain products is conducted is a first step before any viral campaign is implemented. Another consideration is whether a viral campaign will match the values and image of the brand. While viral marketing seems like the future of public relations and the communication industries, there is still much research that needs to be done so successful campaigns are produced and well-received by the public.

The discrepancy between what this current research found compared to the Rodgers Chen (2002) study dealing with public relations' attitude towards the Internet could be explored further. Why were public relations professionals more receptive to using the Internet in the 2002 study than in this current study? It would be helpful to look at what purpose this new technology is playing in the industry. The incongruity could lie in the evolving nature of the Internet and what the practitioners were going to the Internet to accomplish. Therefore, by performing another quantitative study like Rodgers and Chen, insight could be gained into why public relations professionals feel reluctance to turning to the Internet with viral marketing.

Implications for the Future

The evolving nature of viral marketing demonstrates that no professional can get too comfortable with reaching audiences in one manner. Technology is constantly changing and the industries must keep up. If this is not done, they will not effectively reach their audiences. Public relations learned their lesson by being laggards with viral marketing. By being behind the curve, it puts them perpetually behind with all the new technology. The best thing to do is to embrace the changes in technology and methods.

As was learned with viral marketing, it is important to follow the audiences with their media preferences. This is really the only way to reach consumers. The more marketing messages that are infiltrate all media, the more creative professionals will need to be. Right now, viral marketing provides a subtle way to reach consumers and become a part of their lives. Relationship marketing seems to be the future. Being able to have a two-way communication with audiences seems to be effective in building brand loyalty

and buzz. The better a consumer knows a brand and product, the more they will talk about it to their friends.

Technology changes will allow people to connect even easier. Being able to tap into those networks is key for practitioners. Information will spread faster and along these lines of communication. Also, more people are able to be apart of the move to the Internet. Changing technology allows for more access for more people. So while right now new media is ruled by the younger generation; that is changing. In the future, more and more demographics will be available through the Internet. It will be important for professionals to remember that the messages must be tailored to the audience. What is working right now with viral, that being relying mostly on humor, may not be the best way to hit all the audiences turning to the Internet. It is just something to keep in mind as technology continues to transform lives and how professionals reach consumers.

The most important thing for public relations practitioners to remember for the future is to keep up with the trends. They do not want to fall behind the other communication industries again. By joining forces with them, public relations can better understand trends and keep up with technology and audiences.

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