AN EVALUATION OF THE DIFFERENT ADVERTISING METHODS IN VIRAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the different methods used in viral video advertising, with the eventual aim of proposing the most successful strategy.

A study of the relevant literature demonstrated that whilst the 'details' of a message are considered a key determinant in the pass along process, little research investigating this particular phenomena existed. This investigation aimed to fill this void that had been left by viral marketers.

Exploratory research in the form of a semi structured focus group was conducted to help determine the 'methods' used in viral videos, and to generate appropriate hypotheses. The focus group found that the predominant methods were either 'humorous,' 'shocking' or 'sexual' in nature. The 'methods' were then tested through the use of an online questionnaire, from which the data gathered was analysed with statistical techniques.

The principal findings of the report were that videos which employed a 'humorous' method were more likely to be a) enjoyed and b) more likely to be forwarded than those that employed either a 'shocking' or a 'sexual' tactic. The implications of the findings were discussed and recommendations for further research provided.

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1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Aims

The aim of this project is to investigate the types of advertising methods that are used in viral marketing campaigns. The project will focus on viral advertising, a part of viral marketing which consists of a company creating contagious video advertisements or similar material that gets passed from peer to peer via the internet (Kirby 2004 p 2). Through the application of different persuasive advertising strategies (humour, shock, sex appeal etc) these messages contain a certain 'wow' factor, which aims to arouse the interest and stimulate the desire to pass it on (Godin 2000 p 61). This 'wow' ingredient has been labelled by Malcolm Gladwell (2000) as the 'stickiness factor', and has been acknowledged by many viral marketing practitioners as one of, if not the key element in determining whether or not a message is forwarded (Gangadharbatia et al 2005, Phelps et al 2004, Kirby 2006).

While much prior research has focussed on investigating the individual and situational factors behind the forwarding of a message, little is known about how the different types of messages effect the recipient's decision to pass it on or not. Amongst many industry leaders there seems to be a common assumption that if the message is entertaining enough, then it will be forwarded. In recent years however, many like Marsden (2004), have called for more research into this topic, the findings of which could provide companies and viral marketers with a key guide during the planning and design stages of any further campaigns. This project aims to determine which advertising strategy, if any,

has a higher chance of success within the selected sample. Success in the context of this project will be determined by the likelihood to forward the viral message. Much like many viral marketing campaigns, the degree of exposure is one of the key elements that determine the relative success of a campaign (Helm 2000).

1.2 Project Layout

The project is divided into five parts, with each part detailing a key stage of the investigation. It was decided by the author that due to the relatively novel nature of viral marketing, a clear and concise background to the conditions which facilitated viral marketing growth should be explored before any literature was reviewed.

Also, for the sake of clarity, it should be noted that abbreviations were used in this study when referring to the hypotheses (ie, H1, H2)

1.3 The decline of traditional advertising

"*The traditional marketing model we all grew up with is obsolete*."
(Jim Stengel 2004[1])

Over the past decade, markets and the technologies that support them have endured fast changes; Changes that have affected the way in which companies communicate with their consumers as well as how consumers interact with one other (Kotler et al 2002 p ix). This transitional period has left the marketing industry in a state of turmoil. Industry leaders have made no secret of the fact that traditional marketing campaigns, based on mass

[1] Stengel, J (2004). as quoted in "Connected Marketing" Kirby et al (2006) p xviii

media advertising, are simply not working anymore (Kirby et al 2006, Roberts 2005, Rosen 2000, Light 2004, Strengel 2004).

This is an idea that seems also to be borne out by statistics (See Appendix 1).

Contrasting premises exist as to the exact causes of this decline, however the majority of scholars have highlighted a selection of contributory factors; Escalating advertising costs (Degraffenreid 2006), increasing adverting clutter (Godin 2002), as well as technological advances such as video recorders with ad skipping technology (Kirby et al 2006), more fragmented media channels (Oliver 1994) and the rise in popularity of other forms of communication such as the internet has lead many marketing experts to question the future of advertising (Roberts 2005). Indeed, some have even argued that external issues has created a consumer with a higher level of media awareness and even, in certain cases, cynicism towards traditional marketing (Perry et al 2002, Salzman et al 2003, Rosen 2000).

For companies, the key implication of the decline in effectiveness of these traditional methods was the necessity to find innovative ways of embracing these new technologies in a manner that fitted their corporate goals. Some marketers attempted to counteract this trend by exploring a number of alternative marketing techniques that reached the consumer while bypassing traditional advertising methods; such as permission marketing, guerilla marketing and amongst others viral marketing.

The latter has experienced a tremendous growth as a result of the development of the internet and the uptake of digital media (Kirby et al 2006 p 87). The internet and its peer to peer technologies such as chat rooms, forums, instant messaging and file transfer have enabled messages to spread faster and more exponentially than ever before.

Indeed, among practitioners, discussions of viral marketing and examples of companies attempting to use viral marketing during the last five years have become more and more common. (Bush 2000, Aguirre 2001, Shirky 2000, Krishnamurthy 2000, Ives 2005, Nyilasy 2006)

1.4 The rise of viral marketing

The venture capitalists Draper Fisher Jurvetson's successful Hotmail campaign was the first attempt at viral marketing. Hotmail, a free email hosting website, attached a message on each email sent out encouraging the receiver to also get the email provider and in turn, they passed it on to their friends and relatives[2]. Hotmail was a huge success and in 1997 reached over 10 million users and was purchased by Microsoft for $400million[3].

Budweiser and John West Salmon were two other early adopters, and they produced campaigns which consisted of allowing digital video files of cool and funny TV ads to 'escape' early on the web before they became available through more traditional media.

[2] Jurvetson (2000) - http://www.dfj.com/cgi-bin/artman/publish/steve_may00.shtml
[3] Tschong (1998) - http://www.edove.com.tw/vm/writing_003.html

Since these early days, the concept of Viral Marketing has evolved tremendously, and has developed as a result of the immense growth and advances made by the internet. The development and increasing adoption of digital technologies such as broadband have enabled people to enjoy richer online content.

According to a recent report by Mintel UK (2004), broadband subscriptions in the UK had reached 14% of the total online community and this figure was expected to increase significantly in the forthcoming years. The report also highlighted the increase in usage of the internet as an entertainment medium, proposing that technological advances in the forthcoming years such as greater bandwidth will further accelerate this shift. In a practical sense, viral marketers had began to realise the potential for providing consumers with 'entertaining' online advertising, and as such viral video advertising recorded an intriguing rise to prominence.

Whilst at present it is estimated that online video advertising spending represents just under a tenth of a percent of the overall US advertising budget (Rodgers 2005), a recent Jupiter Research paper (2005) predicts a 64% jump in this particular segment this year alone.

In recent years, highly popular viral entertainment websites such as iFilm, Bore Me and Kontraband, have emerged showcasing the latest viral videos. According to Cohen (2005) these websites each receive on average a million visits a day, whilst a report

conducted by the Online Publishers Association (2006) found that a quarter of internet users now regularly watch videos online each week.

This has lead many marketers to conclude that continuing increases in broadband availability and online video usage will further lead to a more prominent use of viral advertising (Cohen 2005, Kirby 2006, Rodgers 2005).

2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is viral marketing?

"*Viral marketing can be understood as a communication and distribution concept that relies on customers to transmit digital products via electronic mail to other potential customers in the social sphere and to animate these contacts to also transmit the products*." (Helm 2000 p 158)

Researchers agree that the defining of viral marketing is a complex construct (Perry et al 2002 p 9). Steve Jurverston and Tim Draper were the first to introduce the term in 1997 (Kirby 2006), and they define Viral Marketing as "network enhanced word of mouth" (Juverston 2000)." However for such an overused and relatively new term, disagreements concerning its exact definition exist among marketing scholars. Some, (e.g. Pastore 2000), quite simplistically view viral marketing as word of mouth, in which consumers tell other consumers about the product or service.

According to Nyilasy (2006) however, word of mouth has been around in business terms for over 50 years, and although the roots of viral marketing's concepts may be lie in word of mouth, viral marketing is not pure word of mouth. Nyilasy, does, however concede that for viral marketing to be fully understood a certain level of understanding of the word of mouth concept must still be recognised. He sees word of mouth as "*person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service*." (Nyilasy 2006 p 162)

Similarly, others such as Perry (2002) and Howard (2005 p 6) have conceded that whilst its principles are not new, "*viral marketing is today's electronic equivalent of old fashioned word of mouth*", whilst Kaikati and Kaikati (2004 p 9) view viral marketing as *"'word of mouth' through a digital platform*."

Others such as Modzelewski (2000 p 30) argue that "*true viral marketing differs from word-of mouth in that the value of the virus to the original consumer is directly related to the number of other users it attracts. That is, the originator of each branch of the virus has a unique and vested interest in recruiting people to the network*."

Contrasting to all of the opinions, Kirby (2004) sees viral marketing as the missing link between traditional advertising and word of mouth, arguing that viral marketing contains elements of both traditional top down advertising and the more bottom up approach of word of mouth (See Appendix 2). He states that while viral marketing, much like traditional methods, "*delivers classic ATL drivers, such as increased awareness and*

premium brand building, it is not an interruptive technique and it doesn't buy exposure." Instead, viral campaigns 'work' the Internet via peer-to-peer endorsement, much like how word of mouth recommendations spread offline.

3.0 Measuring viral campaigns

There seems to be little doubt amongst marketers that the relative success of a viral marketing campaign can be gauged from the degree of exposure that the 'message' has received. Indeed for many the ultimate goal of viral marketing is to reach as many potential customers as quickly as possible and at the lowest cost (Buttgen et al 2003). As such it can be assumed that the higher the numbers of individuals that have made contact with the viral content, the greater the relative success of a campaign (Helm 2000 p 160).

For Kirby (2004), the success of a viral video campaign is currently determined based on whether or not, or to what extent the video in question has gone 'viral.' By this Kirby explains that success is judged on the level of which material has been seen rather than to what happens once content has been viewed. Kirby warns, however, that a high level of exposure is no guarantee for tangible long term brand benefits. He cites the example of Budweiser, whose sales dropped by 8% in the year 2000 despite their award winning 'wasup' viral campaign (Kirby 2006 p xix). To counter this, Kirby suggests that companies must be clear with their objectives in the beginning, and identify whether the aims of the project are to create short term brand awareness or are focussed more on providing potential long term gains.

Fritz (2004 p 163) states that the aims of viral marketing projects can be grouped into either 'economic' or 'non economic' goals. It must be emphasised, however, that regardless of whether a campaign's aims are 'economic or 'non economic', viral marketing initiatives rely on a high pass along rate from person to person. Therefore, a clear understanding of the factors influencing pass along behaviour must be developed.

In a recent paper, Gangadharbatia and Daugherty (2005 p 16-17) argue that "*pass along behaviour does have a high level of control and could be to some extent explained by the theory of reasoned action (TRA)*."

They observe that pass along behaviour is dependant on a number of different variables, and its relationship with these variables must be tested and discussed. In an attempt to quantify the distinct variables involved in this process, Gangadharbatia and Daugherty propose a conceptual model to understand consumer's pass along behaviour (See Appendix 5). In this model, factors are grouped into either individual, situational or message factors. Gangadharbatia and Daugherty are quick to admit that whilst much research exists concerning individual and situational factors, little is known about how the different types of message (message factors) affect a recipients' decision to forward a viral message or not.

Much of the research involved with the identifying and exploring of the factors influencing pass along behaviour have, in some way or another Marsden (2004) claims stemmed from Malcolm Gladwell's work on social epidemics.

Indeed Gladwell's *Tipping Point* (2000) is perhaps the most influential and significant book to date on the power of word of mouth. In his book, Gladwell claims that viral marketers strive to reach the 'tipping point,' which is "*the moment when a domino effect is triggered and an epidemic of demand sweeps through a population like a highly contagious mind virus*.[4]"

Gladwell outlines a simple three-point formula for how word of mouth hits happens successfully: 'the Law of the Few,' the 'Stickiness Factor,' and 'the Power of Context.' While significant studies exist on the 'Law of the Few' theory (Cakim 2006, Godin 2000, Rosen 2000, Silverman 2001), few have sought to unravel the implications of the 'Stickiness Factor.' This element concerns the actual content and presentation of a message, and as such can be strongly likened to the 'message details' factor outlined in Gangadharbatia and Daugherty's' model.

3.0 The importance of strategic seeding

One of the elementary ingredients of a successful viral marketing campaign is its initial seeding procedure. Quite simply, a viral marketing campaign will not bring the desired results if an attempt is made to reach every possible consumer on the internet. According to Feick and Price (1984 p 84), if companies are to achieve their marketing goals, advertisers will need to understand which consumers are most likely to pass messages along and why.

Once these consumers have been identified they should form part of a campaign's target group, which Bruhn (2004 p 207) defines as the people for whom the marketing message

[4] Gladwell (2000) as quoted in Marsden (2004)

is planned. It is essential to the success of viral marketing initiatives that opinion leaders and influentials form a key part of this group. Previous research has shown that these certain individuals influence a greater circle of people than others (Cakim 2006, Godin 2000, Rosen 2000, Marsden 2004); therefore the selection of these individuals for the initial seeding process increases the chance of the message reaching the critical mass (Silverman 2001 p 32).

The 'Law of the Few' theory addresses a key group of influentials, whom Gladwell (2000) claims are the 10% of any target market that will drive the buying behaviour of the other 90%. Gladwell asserts that trends, in everything from fashion to crime to media, including viral marketing campaigns, spread like viruses thanks to Mavens, Connectors and Salesmen:-

"*Mavens are date banks. They provide the message. Connectors are social glue: they spread it. But there is also a select group of people – salesmen – with the skills to persuade us*.[5]"

Whilst Gladwell has been credited by many as the founder of the 'Law of the Few' theory, the concept behind it dates back to a 1940s study on media influence conducted by Katz and Lazarsfeld at Columbia University. The investigation found that mass media messages do not directly influence the mass market but instead influence a small minority of individuals who then influence peers through word of mouth. Based on these findings, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) later proposed a new 'two-step flow' model of media

[5] Gladwell (2000b) as quoted in "Alternative Marketing Vehicles: The Future of Marketing 'To One' (2003)

influence to replace the discredited 'magic bullet' or 'hypothermic needle' model of direct media influence (See Appendix 3).

After Gladwell, many researchers have investigated the conditions and principles behind which the 'Law of the Few' theory has its foundations.
According to Marsden (2006 p 8) however, although some subtle differences may lie behind the proprietary spin, the principles behind the theory remain very much the same.

Since Gladwell, Rosen (2000) has labelled these influentials as 'viral mavens' and 'hubs,' Godin (2000) called them 'sneezers,' Silverman (2001) branded them as 'champions,' Salzman (2001) referred to them as 'alphas' or 'bees' whilst McConnell and Huba (2002) classified them as 'evangelists'.

More recently research by Burson-Marsteller (1999) has discovered that groups of influential individuals exist on the online domain. According to Cakim (2006), who is the director of knowledge at Burson-Marsteller, these 'e-fluentials' use internet word of mouth and viral marketing to form public opinion. Burson-Marsteller conducted a research report in 1999 which proposed that e-fluentials make up 10% of the worldwide internet population and that one e-fluential has a profound influence on up to 8 people. More recent research (Burston-Marsteller 2005) has also highlighted a new group, labelled tech-fluentials, who are the first to try the latest technological products, the majority of which are internet based.

Cakim (2006) recommends that companies attempting viral marketing campaigns should look to seed towards these e-fluentials to maximise the potential of campaigns.

3.1 The importance of the 'message'

"*The key to successful viral marketing is finding a message that your audience wants to share and for which they receive social status.*"
(Stephen Surman[6])

Researchers and marketers have long been in agreement that the content of a viral marketing message is a key determinant of whether or not a message is forwarded. (Rosen 2000, Kirby 2006, Grossman 1998, Helm 2000, Domingos 2005).

Frey (2002 p 236) explains that the message must have a true value to the sender as well as the receiver, and if this value is not perceived the message will not be forwarded (Helm 2000 p 161). Helm (2000) further emphasizes the importance for companies to get the message right. He claims that companies should spend extensive time and money developing the message, as a poor message will inevitably yield a low exposure.

Gladwell (2000) labels this phenomenon as the 'stickiness factor.' For Gladwell a message is 'sticky' when it contains a certain character which causes it to remain active in people's minds. He admits that the stickiness of a message can only be pinned down through intensive testing and experimentation. Indeed, Marsden (2004) agrees claiming that the full implications of the 'stickiness factor' have yet to be unraveled and explored.

[6] Surman - http://www.ciadvertising.org/sa/fall_05/adv392/jodilisa/Paper1/future.html

More specifically, in relation to viral advertising, Smith (2004) explains that to optimize the spread of a message, the content must be entertaining and engaging as the online audience will ultimately pass on 'advertainment' and not advertisements. He adds that the success of viral video advertising has lead to an increasing clutter of 'cheap third rate virals.' Smith (2004) recommends that, to facilitate this process, it is vital companies know exactly what types of message consumers want to view.

Advertising is defined by Belch and Belch (2001 p15) as "*any paid form of communication about an organization, product, service or idea by an identified sponsor*." According to Thorson (1990 p 197) by its very nature, advertising is a form of persuasive communication, and as a creative social science it continually searches for innovative ways to capture audiences' attention in order to communicate a particular message. Viral advertising is no different. The application of these differing 'innovative' methods give the viral video an inherent 'wow' factor, which Godin (2000) asserts is aimed to stimulate the desire to pass it on.

A recent study by the Copenhagen Business School (2005) concerning viral marketing identified these key methods as being humorous, sexual or shocking/violent. An article by the BBC News Magazine (2005) tended to back this up, stating that the three most popular types of viral marketing are those outlined by the Copenhagen Business School.

3.2 The different methods employed

Whilst relatively few reports exist discussing the different methods of advertising in the online domain, a brief look at the literature concerning more traditional advertising should provide a useful insight.

According to Parsons (et al 1997 p 17), while the use of humour in advertising mediums represents an investment of billions of dollars per year, historically creative copywriters such as Reeves (1960) suggested that advertising should never seek to amuse. Ogilvy (1985), however, argued that changes in the publics taste, attitudes, and values have led to a wider acceptance of humorous propositions.

Previous research conducted by Video Storyboard (Custer 1995) found that 62% of the public believes that humorous spots are the single most influential commercial available; however this has not always been justified by empirical measurements of the results. Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990) found no direct effects of humour on brand attitude or purchase intent, and in that regard they concur with Madden (1988) and Speck (1991) who concluded that a humorous approach was not universally superior to a non humorous approach.

In relation to newer forms of advertising mediums, such as the internet, Fugate (1998 p 456) suggests that humour may provide a more appropriate advertising format as it is adaptable to almost any medium. He adds that the universal appeal of humour and its ability to be visual and/or verbal means that it could break possible cultural barriers greater than non-humorous methods.

Press accounts make it clear that 'shock' tactics are a widely used method of advertising (Cosper 1997, Vagnoni 1999, Wald 1999).

Venkat and Abi-Hanna (1995) claim that advertisements that contain shocking content are aimed at surprising an audience by deliberately violating norms of societal values or personal ideals. It is this norm violation aspect of the shock appeal that is assumed to underline its ability to break through the advertising clutter.

According to research undertaken by Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchanda (2003), shocking advertising content is superior to non shocking content in its ability to attract attention and facilitate memory for the advertisement. Furthermore, in relation to viral advertising campaigns, Boreme.com claimed that the most downloaded and viewed video of the year 2005 was the 'shocking' VW Polo suicide bomber viral[7].

Sex in advertising can be understood as mediated messages containing sexual information (sexual imagery, innuendos etc) with the persuasive purpose of selling branded goods (Reichert et al 2001 p 13).

Taflinger (1996) explains that sex is regarded as the second strongest of the psychological appeals, right behind self-preservation, and that that the use of 'sexual' content in advertising messages can be regarded as an attempt to manipulate this factor.

In an essay by the marketing research company Gallup and Robinson[8], they discuss that their extensive analysis of advertising effectiveness over a 50 year period has lead them to conclude that the use of 'erotic' or 'sexual' methods are significantly above-average in communicating with the marketplace in comparison with various other methods. In

[7] Quoted from - http://www.boreme.com/boreme/funny-top10/top10-virals-2005.php
[8] Located at http://www.gallup-robinson.com/essay2.html

relation to the use of 'sexual' techniques in viral marketing, Brown (2005) acknowledged that whilst certain 'sexual' strategies have proved very effective, others that use overly explicit sexual imagery are unlikely to be forwarded by the large majority.

3.3 Summary of literature review

A review of the literature raised the following key points:

- Researchers agree that to a certain extent, the relative success of a viral marketing campaign can be assessed on the exposure that they receive.
- Marketers agree that 'message details' or the 'stickiness' level of messages are key determinants of whether a viral is forwarded or not
- Researchers such as Marsden (2004) suggest that more research is necessary on 'message details'

After a thorough evaluation of available literature it became apparent to the author that although anecdotal evidence of viral marketing successes existed, little was known about how the different types of message details or content affect their likelihood to be forwarded. Therefore this investigation is an attempt to fill this void.

At this stage, the author believed that perhaps before an understanding of why something happens can develop, a clear understanding of what actually is happening must occur. Therefore a brief analysis of Phelps et al's (2004 p335) model depicting a typical pass-along email may prove useful (See Appendix 4). The model illustrates the four various stages involved in such as process; (1) the receipt of a pass-along email message; (2) the

decision to open or delete the message; (3) if opened, the reading/decoding of the message; (4) deciding whether to forward the message on to others. This investigation will focus on elements of both stage 3 and 4, as the study is aiming to explore the relationship between the decision of whether or not to forward the message to others (stage 4) based on the typical content of the message (stage 3).

4 - METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Objectives

The general aim of this project is to investigate the different techniques used in viral video advertising. The investigation endeavoured to identify the most common techniques used, and aimed to test the effectiveness of these methods.

4.2 Research Approach

This project is primarily deductive in its approach as it aims to propose a set of hypotheses based on the appropriate theory and then to test these hypotheses using a form of empirical enquiry; However, an inductive approach is also adopted to build the theory from which the hypotheses can be generated.

Both exploratory and descriptive methods were used in this study. The author felt that this multi method approach was necessary as before any empirical research could be justified, a clearer understanding of the issues involved was needed. The exploratory measures employed were aimed at providing fresh new insights into an area of viral

marketing where very little research had been carried out, as well as helping to propose a set of hypotheses that could then be statistically tested using descriptive research

4.2.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy was positivist as the hypotheses were expressed in operational terms. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on a highly structured methodology to facilitate replication, and on observations that lend themselves to statistical analysis (Gill and Johnson 1997 p 82).

5. Exploratory Research

Although arguably enough evidence was gathered and formulated in the literature review for the generating of hypotheses; many of the sources concerning advertising methods that were examined focused on traditional advertising.

The author, therefore, decided that it was necessary to conduct some exploratory research in order to justify any empirical study, and in order to generate hypotheses that could be tested.

A semi structured focus group was conducted on February 16th 2006 and involved 5 members of the selected sample (See 10.0). Although focus group interviews are relatively unstructured and fairly free flowing in nature (Zikmund 2000), a list of particular themes and questions to be covered were generated before hand. According to Fisher (2004 p 143) the success of focus group interviews rely to a large extent on the role of the moderator; As a result much care was taken to ensure that the moderator

explained the purpose of the interview clearly to the respondents, encouraged them to relax and helped to initiate the discussion.

A suitable location was pre-arranged, one that strongly reduced the likelihood of interruption or being overheard. A TV was installed and a DVD featuring 25 successful various viral advertisements (See Appendix 6) was produced and shown to members of the group. Each clip ranged between 20 seconds to 6 minutes in length and took approximately 30 minutes to view them all.

After viewing the videos the following issues were raised and discussed:-

- Predominant methods employed in viral videos (humour, shock, sex, celebrity, etc)
- Feelings of respondents towards each of the different methods
- Whether they felt that the different type of methods have an effect on the likelihood of it being forwarded
- What viral videos did they enjoy the most? What ones were they more likely to forward?

The focus group lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. Notes were made by the researcher both during the interview and at the end of the interview.

5.1 Focus Group Findings

A brief summary of the findings can be found in the Appendix (See Appendix 6). The main conclusions drawn from the focus group were:-

- That the three most common methods employed are sex, shock and humour
- Humour was generally the most enjoyed. Sexual tactics were the least enjoyed
- Respondents agreed conclusively that the different methods have a direct bearing on their likely hood to forward it on.
- Humour was most likely to be forwarded. Sex was least likely.
- Humour was said to be more likely to be forwarded to a wider range of people, as the other two methods were very restricted due to their controversial or inappropriate nature.

6.0 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were thus proposed on the basis of the literature review and findings from exploratory research.

H1 – Viral Videos that employ a humorous method are more likely to be forwarded than those that employ sexual or shocking tactics.

H2 – Viral Videos that employ a humorous method are more enjoyed by the recipients than those videos that employ sexual or shocking tactics.

H3 - Viral Videos that employ a sexual method are less likely to be forwarded than those that employ shocking tactics.

H4 – Respondents agree when questioned that the different types of viral advertising method used (shock, sex, humour) have an effect on their likelihood to forward the video.

H5 – There will be differences in the types of viral videos forwarded between 'influentials' and 'non-influentials'.

H6 – The more someone enjoys a viral video, the higher the likelihood of them forwarding the video.

As very little previous research had been carried out on the different methods used in viral advertising, this final year project proved indeed both challenging and interesting.

7.0 Secondary Research

Secondary research is information collected from second hand sources such as reference books, government statistics or marketing intelligence reports.

During this study past researches, reports on viral marketing and related topics, websites of viral video archives, forums and blogs were examined.
However, the author did encounter some limitations with this type of research. Due to the topic's relative novelty useful data was not always readily available.
Furthermore, problems with accuracy had to be considered with the use of the internet and selected websites. Whilst a review of message board conversations on viral marketing could give the author valid insights into consumer perceptions, the information is in no way solid enough to form concrete arguments or testable hypotheses.

Secondary research facilitated the selection of the appropriate sample, as well as providing the basis for the selection and designing of questions in the questionnaire.

8.0 Choice of Questionnaire

For the purpose of this project, an online questionnaire was set up and members of the sample were invited to visit a website which contained the questionnaire.

The required web space along with an appropriate domain name was purchased, and the website was located at http://www.viralresearch.net/

Due to the purely internet based nature of the topic under research, viral advertising, the author decided that the use of an online questionnaire would prove more suitable for the purpose of this study, and would facilitate the sampling process. Furthermore, as the questionnaire involved the respondent viewing selected viral video advertisements, a digital platform was necessary and this method was deemed to be the most appropriate.

Additional advantages of the online questionnaire were quite simply that people could remain anonymous and that they could take it at a time and a speed that suited them.

There are a few disadvantages of administering a questionnaire online, and those had to be highlighted, considered and appropriate measures employed to ensure that these disadvantages were kept to a minimum. The principal disadvantage is that approaches of this sort suffer from a notoriously low response rate. A good response rate is "*dependant on the recipients being motivated to answer the questionnaire (*Saunders et al 2003 p 310)." In an attempt to achieve this, a suitable and adequate 'non monetary incentive[9]' was offered to those that took part.

Furthermore the author acknowledged that alternative computer operating systems, internet browsers and display screens could result in the images and videos being displayed differently (Dilman 2000). The questionnaire was designed with this is mind,

[9] Respondents that filled out the questionnaire were entered into a prize draw for a £50 gift voucher for amazon.co.uk

and was tested using a variety of different possible scenarios to ensure that the questionnaire was accessible to as many people as possible.

8.1 Questionnaire Design

The design of the questionnaire is of paramount importance to the overall success of research projects. Factors such as the designing and wording of individual questions, questionnaire layout and the order and flow of questions must be considered to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected.

The website that hosted the questionnaire had 13 pages in total, 9 of which were the questionnaire itself (See Appendix 7). To begin the questionnaire, respondents had to click through a link found on the index page of the website.
The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections. The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix (See Appendix 8)

The first section was aimed at building the respondents profile. It consisted of 4 questions regarding respondent's usage of the internet and exposure to viral marketing campaigns. The first question looked at respondents average internet usage in hours per week and the second asked for their primary reason of going online. Both were category questions and the different categories offered were established by the author after thorough analysis of secondary data. Suitable categories had been found in past reports, however the author decided that for the purpose of this study new categories should be created to allow more accurate collection of the data.

Both the first two questions had available only 6 categories as Fink (1995) recommends that self administered questionnaires, such as this, should limit the number or response categories to 5 or 6, so that not to affect the accuracy of responses.

Questions 3 and 4 asked how often in the past 12 months respondents had forwarded viral video advertisements in general, and how often they had forwarded videos that employed either a humorous, shocking or sexual method. The questions were category based, and offered respondents 5 possible responses.

The second section asked a series of questions aimed at determining whether or not the respondents were part of the 'influentials' as discussed in the literature review (See 3.0). The screening process was necessary as part of the project's objectives was to discern differences towards various viral advertising methods among 'influentials' and non 'influentials.' The question was adapted from Burson-Marsteller's 1999 and 2001 study into 'e-fluentials.' Burson-Marsteller used a proprietary algorithm to identify 'e-fluentials, and the formula is based on the frequency (ie, almost daily, a few times a week etc) with which internet users engage in activities such as posting to bulletin boards and participating in chat rooms. Contact was made with Idil Cakim, director of Knowledge Development at Burson-Marsteller, via email concerning the use of their screening process in the questionnaire. Access was granted to reproduce the questions and discussions with Cakim concerning the project lead to further recommendations and advice. In light of the sample and research objectives, Cakim recommended the use of

further screening questions to be included (See Appendix 9). These were taken into account and in total 11 different factors were used to screen for 'influentials.'

Section 3 was by far the largest part of the questionnaire, involving 6 pages, each containing a video clip and 3 identical questions. Six different viral video clips were viewed by the respondent, two of each type of advertising technique. The 3 types of advertising technique used were sex, shock and humour, and these were classified after a review of the literature and appropriate exploratory research. For information and synopsis of the 6 videos please see the appendix (See Appendix 10)

After each video the respondents were asked how much they enjoyed the video, by giving it a rating between 1-5 (5 being the highest). This 'scale' question would directly answer H2. Phelps et al (2004 p 343) found that 'enjoyment' was the second biggest motive in forwarding viral messages.

The next question dealt with the respondant's perception of the nature of the advertisement, and asked whether for them it was predominantly shocking, sexual or humorous.

The third question that was asked after each video was the likeliness of respondents to forward the message to various different groups of individuals such as family members, members of the opposite sex etc. A five point Likert-style rating scale was introduced (very likely, likely, neither likely nor unlikely, unlikely and very unlikely) to measure

their likeliness, and the same order of response categories were maintained throughout to avoid confusing respondents (Dilman 2000). This question was designed to help answer H1, H3 and H5.

The fourth and final section asked respondents quite simply through the use of a Likert style rating scale if they thought that the different advertising methods used (shock, sex, humour) affected their decision of whether or not to forward the viral message. This question would directly answer H4.

The questionnaire was designed in a manner to restrict respondents from omitting answers, meaning that the results gathered would contain no missing data. Additionally, responses would not be forwarded unless every stage of the questionnaire had been completed. This eliminated the possibility of receiving half answered questionnaires. At the end of the questionnaire a message board was provided, and respondents were encouraged to leave any comments. (See Appendix 11)

8.2 Questionnaire management

To identify problems in clarity, understanding, accuracy and functional ability, pilot tests were carried out during the initial phase of the survey. The pilot tests involved 10 respondents, who each viewed the questionnaire from their own personal computer. They were asked to comment on and suggest possible modifications and improvement. As a result, the initial questionnaire was modified slightly. Ambiguous questions and unclear

statements were rephrased, problems with the layout were corrected and technological problems were amended for the second questionnaire.

9.0 Ethical considerations

At this stage it is crucial to underline the role of ethics in the marketing research process, as not only are the concerns of the researcher and the client involved, but the rights of the respondents must also be respected.

This study was designed to meet all the requirements and guidelines outlined in ESOMAR's general code of conduct for research based on the internet[10].

Concerning the selected sample, it was decided that due to some of the sexual and shocking nature of particular viral video advertisements, no respondents would be under the age of 18.

10.0 Sampling Design and Process

The sample selection of the participants was determined based on a purposive strategy, a technique of non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling provides an alternative range of techniques to probability sampling, and relies on the subjective judgement of the researcher. To participate in the questionnaire respondents had to fill two basic criteria, that they were males and aged between 18 and 29. This target group was selected based on the findings of previous research and opinions of key market leaders. Two separate research reports, one by Jupiter (2005) and one from the Online Publishers Association (2004), both highlighted that the overwhelming majority of people who participate in viral video advertisements are male, and under the age of 34. Furthermore according to

[10] ESOMAR 2005 – located at - http://www.esomar.org/web/show/id=49859

Smith (2004) those companies seeking to target young males should look no further than viral marketing methods. Indeed viral marketing has proved to be an extremely successful method in targeting this niche segment of consumers. In marketing terms males aged between 18 -29 fall into either the late generation y (those born after 1980) or the early generation x (those born in 1977 or before) age bracket, and are renowned for being notoriously sceptical of traditional mass media marketing[11].

The author decided that by identifying the segment of consumers that tend to participate in the viral marketing process with a higher frequency than others, any possible findings would prove increasingly useful to viral marketers. Ideally, investigations across the wide spectrum of viral participants, not matter how infrequent their participation, would have been more beneficial, however time and budget restraints confined the study to this one particular segment.

The author's intuition and experience, as well as time and budget restraints were the basis to determine how many people to interview. The collection of results took place between the 6th March and the 6th April. As the project was self administered online, a period of a month was given, during which results were filled out by members of the sample who were driven to the website from various sources. Messages were placed on placed on message boards of viral entertainment websites such as iFilm (See Appendix 12), inviting respondents to fill out the questionnaire. Furthermore, those that took part in the survey could recommend the site to their friends by clicking on a 'refer a friend' link found on the website. Respondents were encouraged to spread the word of the questionnaire

[11] Biz/ed Online - http://www.bized.ac.uk/compfact/redbull/redbull7.htm

amongst peers in their social network, thus using the principles of word of mouth to help draw attention to, and generate interest into the research.

The author aimed for 200 completed quetionaires, however in reality due to the uncontrollable nature of online surveys the level of response was very difficult to control, and it was decided that anything over 100 responses would be deemed sufficient.

11 - RESEARCH FINDINGS

11.1 Response

During the month long period dedicated to data collection, a total of 119 questionnaires were fully completed. According to inbuilt site statistics 45% or respondents recommended the site to a friend using the direct link on the index page. Furthermore the questionnaire was filled out by people all over the world, from Brazil to New Zealand, however the large majority were focussed in the UK and central European counties (See Appendix 13).

11.2 Data analysis methods

The data gathered was analysed using the statistical package SPSS version 11.5. To enable the ease of data entry, as well as to reduce the number of possible errors, questions were pre-coded beforehand. By formulating an appropriate coding scheme prior to data collection, decisions on the most appropriate statistical tools for analysis could be reviewed and the most suitable methods chosen.

To process the data gathered, variables were divided into ordinal, nominal or scale and were associated with each answer of respondents. The answers were coded with positive values i.e. 1 = Very Unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Neither Likely nor Unlikely, 4 = Likely, 5 = Very Likely.

To further limit possible errors, certain measures were taken. Firstly, each questionnaire was given an individual id number, allowing identifiable errors to be easily rectified. Secondly all data was double checked to look for illegitimate codes, illogical relationships and mistakes in data input. The author acknowledged that although this process was extremely time consuming, it was essential as it greatly restricted the number of incorrect results from which conclusions would be drawn.

The SPSS programme, for the purpose of this project was used for the creation of frequency tables, descriptive and basic statistics, analysis of variance tests (ANOVA), correlation analysis and cross-tabulations, all of which are explained below

- *Frequency tables* were used to reveal the number of responses that each question received and thus helped to determine the empirical distribution of the variables. Table I – VII exhibits, for example the respondents' profile

- *Descriptive and Basic Statistics* such as *Means*, *Percentages* and *Standard Deviation* were used to form a background to the picture and to help discern any possible patterns to be tested using analytical methods.

- *ANOVA tests* were used to compare variables amongst two or more distinct groups. This test involves comparing variances to make inferences about the means. *ANOVA tests* produce an *F-statistic*, and the larger the ratio of variance, the greater the value of this *F statistic*. To ensure the accuracy of the data, the requirements for successful *ANOVA tests* that were outlined by Hays (1994) were met.

- *Correlation analysis* was used in this investigation to measure the association (relationship) between two variables. Using SPSS, a numerical measure to indicate strength of a relationship, the *correlation coefficient*, can be calculated. Figure 1 below is a guide to interpreting *correlation coefficients* and it will be used in this investigation to place a label of strength on the relationships.

Figure 1 – Rowntree (1991 p 170) A guide to placing strengths on correlation coefficients

Correlation coefficient	*Strength*
0.0 to 0.2	Very weak, negligible
0.2 to 0.4	Weak, low
0.4 to 0.7	Moderate
0.7 to 0.9	Strong, high, marked
0.9 to 1.0	Very strong, very high

For the purpose of this study *Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients (PMCC)* were generated to access the strength of relationships between variables, and appropriate correlation matrixes were created to facilitate the comparing of results.

- *Cross-tabulation* was used to compare respondents' answers to one question in a survey in relation to their answers to other questions. Most commonly respondents' replies to questions on a substantive theme of the research are compared with the respondent's individual characteristics.

11.3 Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses proposed earlier in the investigation (See 6.0) were tested using the range of analytical methods discussed above

For H1, H2 and H3 ANOVA tests were performed to determine the level of variance between the different methods employed (sexual, humour, shock), and respondents enjoyment of the videos and their likelihood to forward them to the various groups of possible recipients.

For H4 a straight mean average would be generated to discern respondents' opinions, and the significance of the result would be determined based on the sample size.

For H5 an ANOVA test compared respondents' answers to questions in the survey based on whether or not they were 'influential' or not. Possible differences in responses of all questions in the survey were investigated, with the exception of question 5, which itself dealt with screening 'influentials' from non-'influentials'.

For H6 bivariate correlation analysis was performed and a correlation matrix of coefficients was generated.

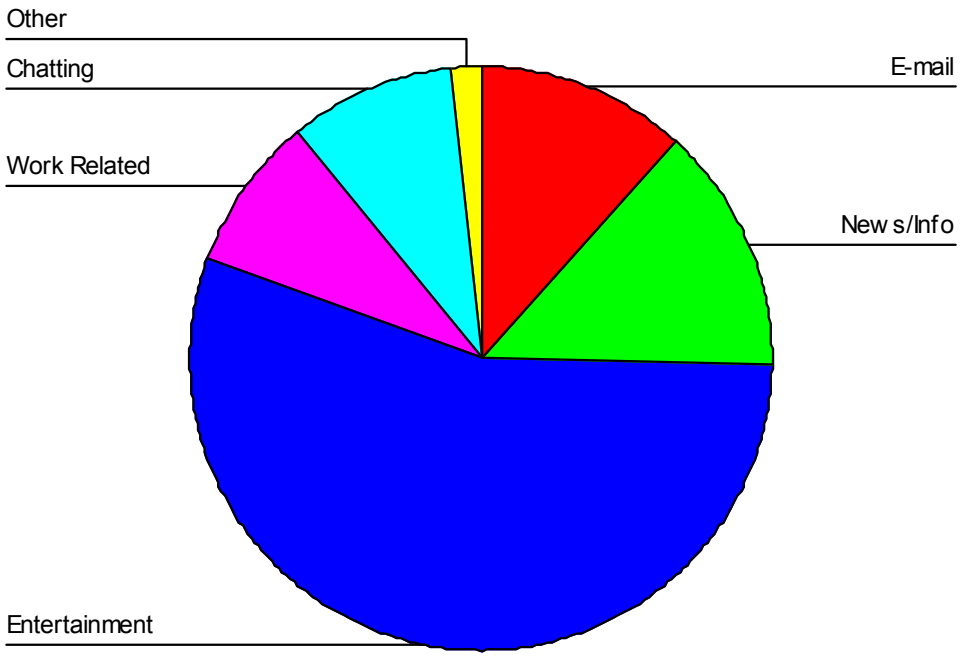
11.4 Respondents Profile

To build the respondent's profile, a series of questions were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire, for which the answers are displayed in Tables I-VI. The tables can found in the appendix. These questions focussed on respondent's usage of the internet and their propensity to forward viral video advertisements. It must be remember at this stage, that due to the highly selective nature of the sample, it was already known that the respondents were males aged between 18 – 29.

Based on an appropriate screening process (See 10.0) the 119 respondents were divided into either 'influentials' (41 respondents, 34.5%) or non 'influentials.' (78 respondents, 65.5%).

Table II indicates the primary reason that the respondents went online was for entertainment purposes (55.5%), whilst the second most popular reason was for News/Information (13.4%). This directly contrasts previous reports (such as Mintel UK 2004) which found that the primary reason was for email, which in this report only accounted for 11.8% of the total. Whilst not a hypotheses as such, these findings back up the literature review which suggested that factors such as the introduction of broadband connection has created an increase in the usage of the internet as an entertainment medium. Figure 2 represents this in the form of a pie chart.

Figure 2 – Respondents' primary reason for going online



Furthermore Table I shows that 51.3% of the sample were online for 14 hours or more per week, whilst only 1.7% spent less than 2 hours on the internet per week.

Table III establishes that a cumulative 29.4% of respondents either forward viral videos daily or a few times per week, whilst only 22.7% of respondents claimed to never forward virals. Tables IV,V and VI further explore respondents' likelihood to forward sexual, shocking and humorous viral videos.

11.5 Hypotheses Results

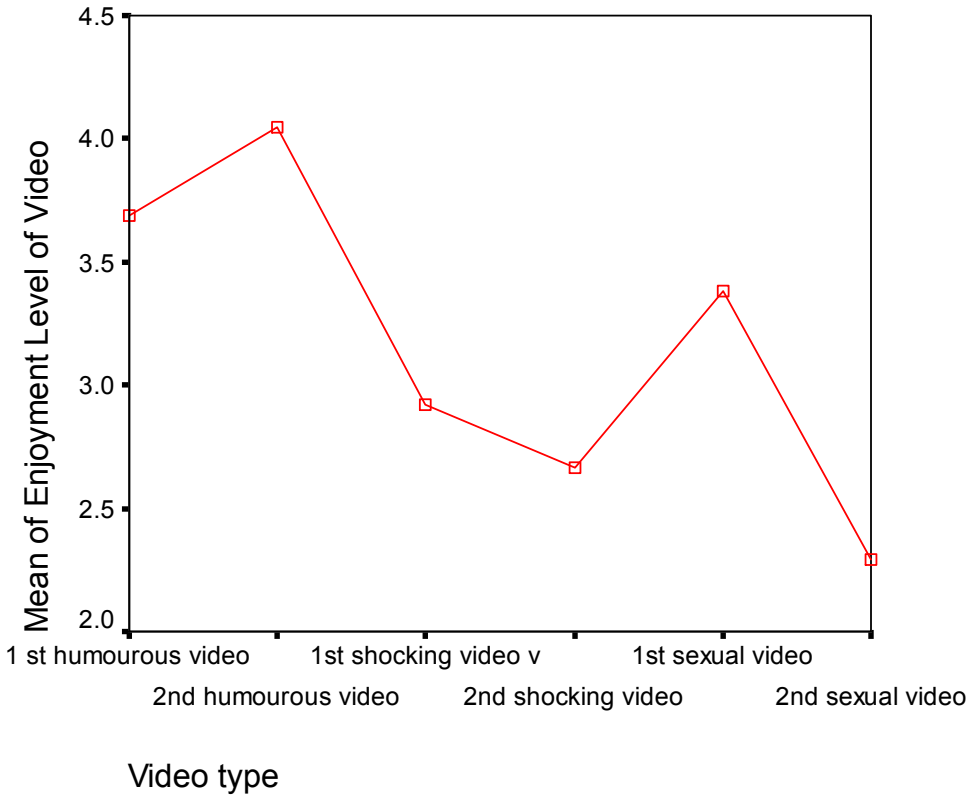
Two separate ANOVA tests were performed to show the level of variance for respondents' enjoyment and likeliness to forward between both the individual 6 videos

(See Appendix 14) and also based on the type of method employed by the videos (See Appendix 16).

Means scores were also generated to help identify the 'strongest' groups, LSD post hoc tests presented the differences between the different groups and Mean plots were produced to visually display this difference.

Figure 3 shows the mean average of 'enjoyment' of each of the 6 viral videos. The most 'enjoyed' viral video of the 6 that were shown was the 2nd humorous video (video 6) which had a mean rating of 4.05, whilst the least enjoyed was the 2nd sexual video (video 5) which had a mean rating of 2.29.

Figure 3 – Mean plot displaying the enjoyment level of selected viral videos



The results tended to indicate that a similar pattern existed amongst the likelihood to forward variables, with the two 'humorous' videos having consistently higher mean scores throughout. Appendix 15 demonstrates this in the form of mean plots.
At this stage it must be noted that a higher mean score, depending on the variable, either represents a higher likelihood to forward viral videos or a higher enjoyment rating. Scores range from 0-5, with 5 being the highest.

The second ANOVA test, which divided the responses amongst the 3 different video methods (sexual, shocking, humorous), stood to confirm what had been inferred in the previous ANOVA test. Results showed that for all categories the level of variance received a significance level of .000, which falls well below the required .05 alpha level. Thus, it was concluded that the differences found between the groups (method of video) were significant and there was less than 1 in a 1000 chance that the differences were found as the result of a sampling error With the null hypotheses rejected, the f statistic's could be reviewed to indicate the rate of the variance. High f statistics amongst all variables tested represented a large variance in all responses between the three groups:

- Enjoyment level (f statistic =69.291 , $p<0.001$,n =119)
- Likelihood to forward to family members (f statistic =103.858 , $p<0.001$,n =119)
- Likelihood to forward to the opposite sex (f statistic =82.084 , $p<0.001$,n =119)
- Likelihood to forward to age group below (f statistic =84.813 , $p<0.001$,n =119)
- Likelihood to forward to age group above (f statistic =68.573 , $p<0.001$,n =119)
- Likelihood to forward to same age group (18-29) (f statistic =55.655 , $p<0.001$,n =119)
- Likelihood to forward to others (f statistic =70.269 , $p<0.001$,n =119)

The results suggested that whilst there seemed to be a high level of variance amongst all categories, the variance was particularly strong for the three categories forward to family, forward to opposite sex and forward to age group below, which may lend itself to the argument which was highlighted by the exploratory research; that respondents found that the content of certain videos were unsuitable for members of these three groups.

A multiple comparisons post hoc-test explored these variances in greater detail and endeavored to establish the difference in means between the three types of method employed. Appendix 16 showed considerable differences in mean scores between humorous to sexual and humorous to shocking videos, whilst differences between shocking and sexual videos were more inconclusive. The humorous videos had a higher mean enjoyment rating (3.87) than the other two methods; the difference between humorous to shocking being -1.08, and humorous to sexual being.-1.03. Results for respondents' likelihood to forward run parallel with the findings that had been suggested with the mean enjoyment rating. The average mean of the combined likelihoods to forward variables was 3.31 for humorous videos, which was on average 1.16 higher than that of the sexual videos and 0.96 higher than shocking videos. These differences are clearly presented via mean plots (Appendix 18) and through the production of average mean scores in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Mean scores for respondents' likelihood to forward video based on the three different methods.

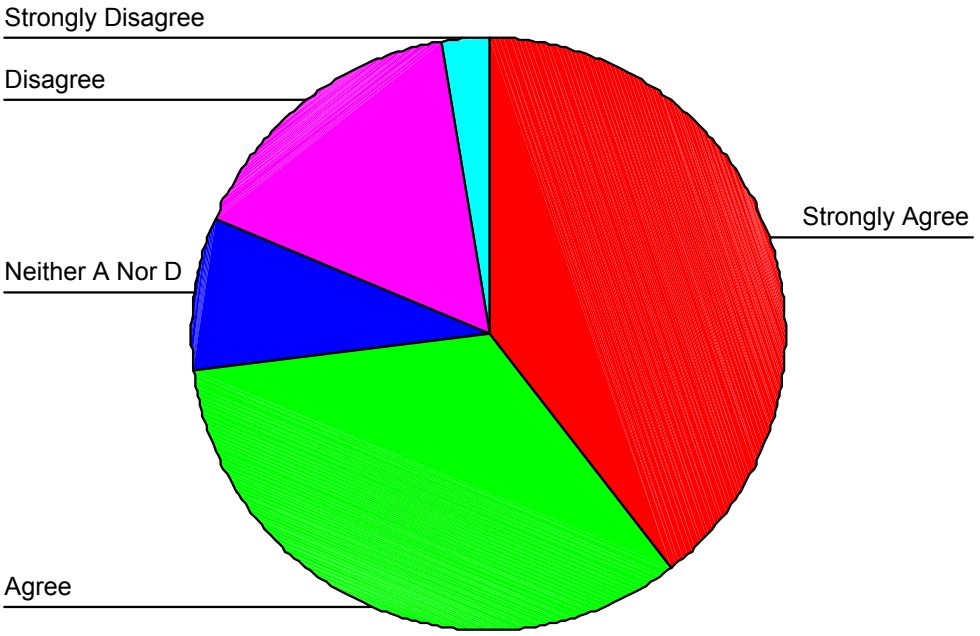
Video - Type of ad method employed		forward video family	forward opposite sex	forward age group below	forward group age above video	forward group same age video	forward others video
shocking	Mean	2.38	2.39	2.21	2.41	2.50	2.28
humorous	Mean	3.33	3.26	3.24	3.37	3.39	3.32
sexual	Mean	2.00	2.03	2.08	2.22	2.32	2.29
Total	Mean	2.57	2.56	2.51	2.67	2.74	2.63

Post Hoc tests also confirmed that the difference between humorous videos and both sexual and shocking had a significance level of .000. The results quite conclusively accept H1 and H2. Appendix 16 tends to suggest that the difference in mean scores between sexual and shocking methods is only significant for the variables forward to family and forward to opposite sex. Whilst in those variables shocking scored a considerably higher mean score for the likelihood to forward than sexual videos, on the other four variables the difference was deemed not to be significant. As the results were not significantly different across the wide range of variables, H3 can only be partially accepted.

For H4 a frequency table with percentages was generated (See Table VIII) and a pie chart constructed to show the results visually (Figure 5). Results found that a cumulative percent of 73.1% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the different viral advertising methods used affect whether they forward the video or not, whilst only 18.5% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results were subjected to a margin of error of +/- 9% and a confidence of 95% [12]. The results accept H4.

[12] Appropriate significance level was generated at - http://www.berrie.dds.nl/calcss.htm

Figure 5 – Respondents' opinion as to whether or not different methods affect decision to forward



An ANOVA test compared respondents' answers to all questions based on whether or not they were influential (See Appendices 19 and 20). The results tended to indicate that on the whole there was little variance between the groups apart from amongst a few key variables. There were significant variations in responses on questions 3 and 4, which focus on respondent's frequency of forwarding viral videos. Question 3, which asked respondents as to their propensity to forward viral video adverts showed the highest variation (f statistic = 46.075, $p<0.001$, n = 119). The results indicated that the 'influentials' tend to forward viral videos more regularly than those non 'influentials.' This backs up previous research such as that carried out by Burson-Marsteller (1999) into Gladwell's law of the few theory which found that those 'influentials' are significantly more likely to forward a brand's message. Although crucial differences were found in

this context, the majority of responses showed a low level of variance and therefore the null hypothesis must be accepted and H5 rejected.

For H6 a Pearson's correlation analysis was carried out to test any possible correlation between enjoyment levels and the likelihood to forward variables. Figure 6 presents the appropriate correlation coefficients in the form of a correlation matrix.

Figure 6 – Correlation matrix for enjoyment level versus likelihood to forward variables

	forward video family	forward opposite sex	forward age group below	forward group age above video	forward group same age video	forward others video
Enjoyment Level						
Pearson Correlation	**.462**	**.482**	**.463**	**.521**	**.535**	**.500**
Significance level (2-tailored)	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**

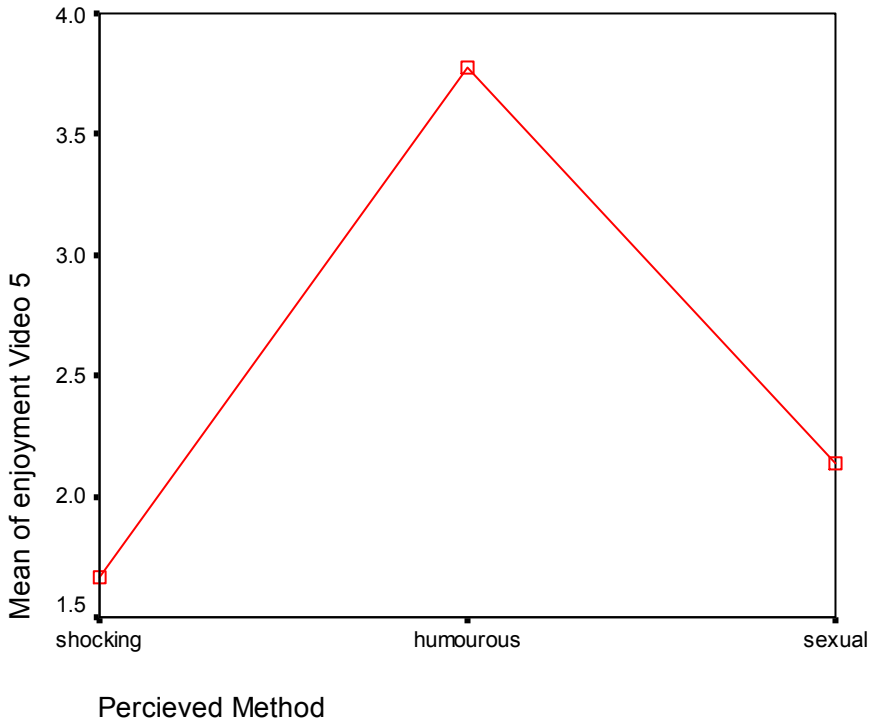
The matrix shows highly significant 'positive' correlations between enjoyment levels and respondents likelihood to forward viral videos. With the use of Figure 1 (See 11.2), the correlation coefficients were all classified as being 'moderate' in strength. The results supported H6, and it was therefore accepted.

11.6 Further Findings

Whilst analysing frequency tables of the different responses, the author discovered relationships between two or more variables that had not been investigated under the hypotheses. The author felt that although convincing conclusion could already be drawn, subsequent analysis of these 'possible' trends could only add to the significance of the research paper.

Firstly, a trend was discovered between respondent's 'perception' of the method employed in a viral video and their enjoyment rating and their likelihood to forward the video. Whilst the videos had already been classified into pre-determined categories based on the advertising method employed (sex, shock, humour), respondents were asked as to their perception of the method that was being employed in each of the six videos. The author noticed that of the videos that employed either a sexual or shocking tactic, if the respondent perceived the video to be 'humorous' rather than 'sexual' or 'shocking' then he was more likely to enjoy and forward viral videos. Appendix 22 illustrates the intriguing relationships with the use of ANOVA tests. Figure 7 shows the difference in enjoyment levels for the 2nd 'sexual' video based on the perceived method employed.

Figure 7 - Mean plot displaying the enjoyment level of the 2nd 'sexual' video based on the perceived method employed



A further ANOVA test was then performed to compare responses divided up between the 3 types of method (Appendix 23). The results validate what previous results had tended

to imply; that that if a non-humorous video is perceived to be humorous then it has more chance of being forwarded than if it was perceived as either shocking or sexual. Whilst this study has already established that humorous viral videos were more likely to be forwarded than those of shock or sexual tactics, these additional findings could make the basis for recommendations for further research.

The second additional test that was performed was a cross tab (See Appendix 25) to compare respondents answers to how frequently they forward viral videos compared to their opinion as to whether different viral advertising methods affect their decision to pass on a message. The results tended to indicate that those who forwarded viral videos with the highest frequency agreed that the type of content affected whether or not they forwarded the message. For example of the 35 respondents that claimed to forward viral videos either 'almost daily' or 'a few times a week' an overwhelming 91% either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the method types affects whether or not the message is forwarded.

12 – DISCUSSION

This study offered a modest introduction at understanding a complex and often misunderstood area of viral marketing.

The primary aim of this investigation was to challenge the widely held assumption amongst viral marketers that if a video is 'entertaining' enough it will be forwarded, regardless of the method employed. Following a thorough review of the literature and appropriate qualitative research, the three predominant methods of 'entertainment' in

viral advertising were highlighted, and quantitative methods were used to determine the most effective of the three.

If there proved to be little or no difference in the methods viewed then the 'assumption' that this investigation was focussed on countering would prove to be correct, and thus the null hypotheses would be accepted.

The findings of the study, however, conclusively reject the null hypotheses and propose that the different methods employed in viral video advertising do have a significant bearing on the a) enjoyment of the video amongst respondents and b) the likelihood of respondents to forward the videos. Of the three advertising methods tested, humorous videos were found to be significantly more likely to be forwarded to a wide range of potential recipients than that of shocking and sexual methods.

Additionally the research highlighted the importance of a viral video being perceived as 'humorous,' as those perceived as humorous were more likely to be forwarded.

The research also showed that respondent's, when directly questioned, declared that the different viral advertising methods had a direct influence on their likelihood to forward videos.

The results were consistent throughout for both influentials and non influentials, with the only difference between the two groups being the propensity with which they forward viral videos in general.

The author believes that the study not only conclusively achieved its research objectives, but offered a wide platform for possible future investigations.

13 – CONCLUSIONS

In recent years the viral marketing arena has developed in numerous ways. Most notably, viral marketing has been transformed from a short term tactic aimed at 'spiking' sales to an essential long term part of a company's marketing efforts. This paradigm shift has brought it to the forefront of the marketing mix, and as a result more companies than ever before have implemented a viral element in to their overall marketing strategies. Viral video advertising, which forms an integral part of viral marketing is no different and has also seen tremendous growth. Technological advances such as an increase in broadband internet connections, coupled with the rise of the internet as an entertainment medium has lead to companies fighting to catch the attention of potential consumers. As such, marketers have learned that to stand out from the growing clutter of mediocre viral videos, they must be more groundbreaking and creative in their use of digital media. This increasingly competitive environment has further emphasised the need for companies to take into account all the possible factors that could maximise exposure levels and determine the relative success of any future campaigns. Along with individual and situational factors, marketers should begin investigating how the different methods of 'entertainment,' and indeed how the content of the viral video itself affects their appropriate likelihoods to be forwarded. Further research into this often 'neglected' area of viral advertising could offer companies with a strategic advantage over its rivals.

The current study illustrates the importance of selecting the appropriate advertising method, and as such implies certain conditions for message creation.

Message developers should note that videos that are perceived by the respondent as humorous are more likely to be forwarded those that are perceived to be non-humorous.

Therefore, whilst to a certain degree messages should aim to remain consistent with those viral strains that are most appropriate to the particular cause, they should also where possible seek to integrate an element of humour into the message.

14 – LIMITATIONS

Conscious efforts were made in a bid to restrict the number of limitations in the project, however inevitably limitations still existed. These limitations were principally imposed by time and budget restraints, and not by any negligence on behalf of the author.

The limitations of this investigation must be acknowledged, and any conclusions drawn from this study must be taken within the context of these limitations.

The key limitations of the study tended to focus around the selected sample. Firstly, it must be noted that due to the highly selective nature of the sample (18-29 year old males), any generalisations drawn from the results gathered must be within the selected sample, and not to the wider population.

Also, prior research had alerted the author to the unpredictable nature of potential response rates with administering a questionnaire online. Therefore the author, in the sampling framework set both a higher desired target level and a lower minimum required level of respondents. Whilst the investigation reached the lower 'required' level of respondents, a larger sample would have provided a more accurate picture, as according to Veal (1997 p 205), '*the larger the sample the more chance it has of being representative*.'

A further crucial limitation that was highlighted concerned the exact specifications of the sample. Although prior research had indicated that males under the age of 34 were the

predominant participants of viral video advertising initiatives, the author decided to focus on those aged between 18-29. The author wanted to focus primarily on generation y males as they are a group that are notoriously regarded as being highly cynical of traditional marketing strategies, making themselves prime targets for new marketing techniques such as viral marketing[13]. Furthermore, it is claimed that these 'millenials' spend a large majority of their time online in comparison to other forms of media (Spero et al 2004), and their usage of the internet is not solely restricted to email, but also forms of entertainment including movies, music and games.

15 - RECCOMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As this particular field of investigation is relatively new, there remains a large amount still to be learned and as such the recommendations for further research are endless. More specifically, in relation to the current study, one particular proposal can be offered. Whilst the findings of this research showed a positive relationship between the perception of an advert as 'humorous' and the likelihood of respondents to forward the video, the study did not cover what aspects made the respondents perceive certain videos as 'humorous.' Therefore qualitative analysis, in the form of various focus groups, is recommended to explore these concepts further. The focus groups should display a variety of viral advertisements to respondents, whom should them be questioned as to what makes certain videos humorous as opposed to alternative classifications. Any findings would have key implications for viral marketers.

Additionally, whilst this study has focussed on how the different methods affect respondents' likelihood to forward, further investigations could focus on how these

[13] Biz/ed Online.- http://www.bized.ac.uk/compfact/redbull/redbull7.htm

different methods affect a range of other factors such as purchase intent or brand awareness.

Any further research should be aware of the limitations encountered in this project and attempt to restrict them in their own investigations.