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**CRITICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE
SUCCESS OF VIRAL MARKETING
CAMPAIGNS**

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ABSTRACT

Viral marketing is no longer a brand-new topic, but for some marketers it remains a relatively marginal topic. There are several reasons for this. Besides incalculable side effects and the complex cost-benefit planning, it is above all the fear of insufficient knowledge about what is important in a viral campaign and which are the relevant success factors that prevent marketers from implementing viral campaigns. Yet well-planned viral campaigns can be rewarding and often achieve an excessive advertising impact, as consumers actively interact with the advertising and voluntarily forward the brand messages. While it is becoming increasingly difficult with classic marketing tools to captivate the attention of customers and achieve the desired effect, viral is becoming a powerful tool to attract customers without irritating them.

This study contributes to the discussion on how to build an effective viral campaign that can benefit businesses. Three case studies around the globe are also examined in the paper to give the reader a list of practical elements of success to consider when executing the viral marketing plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	4
1.1. Background	4
1.2. Research questions	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1. The evaluation of digital advertising	10
2.2. Definition of viral marketing	12
2.3. Viral Marketing classifications	15
2.4. Common transmission methods of Viral Marketing	17
2.5. Benefits and drawbacks of Viral Marketing	19
2.5.1. Benefits of viral marketing	19
2.5.2. Drawbacks of viral marketing	21
2.6. Elements of Viral Marketing	23
2.7. Fundamental factors of a successful viral campaign	26
2.7.1. Audience target characteristic	29
2.7.2. Message content characteristic	30
2.7.3. Transmission characteristic	32

2.7.4. Diffusion characteristic	34
2.7.5. Product/ service characteristic	36
2.7.6. Overall campaign structure characteristic	37
CHAPTER 3: FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY	39
3.1. Research method and conceptual framework	39
3.2. Campaign selections	41
3.3. Data collection	42
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	44
4.1. Case 1: Dove Real Beauty Sketches	44
4.2. Case 2: ALS Ice Bucket Challenge	50
4.3. Case 3: Generali Vietnam- Live The Life You Desire	56
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	66
5.1. Discussion	66
5.2. Conclusion	72
REFERENCES	75
APPENDIX	83

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Corporations have used marketing throughout history to acquire a greater brand share. In the past, word-of-mouth and print advertising were the key methods, however in the last century technology has evolved and has embraced new certain types of marketing, particularly mass-marketing. Radio was at the forefront to help companies advertising campaigns reach thousands of listeners; television followed, used generic mass advertising messages to efficiently reach a wider audience. However, as the Internet soon dominated people's lives, customers became more resilient to these traditional forms, and companies began to shift to a new marketing strategy - online marketing (Jones & Shaw, 2006). Since the beginning of the digital age, brand-new platforms including email, online websites, social networks and blogs have become popular communication channels. The Internet has greatly facilitated communication and reduced the burden of connecting with friends and colleagues, and has quickly become one of the most important sources for customers to seek out and engage with new information. This phenomenon also transformed word of mouth into electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The new environment of digitalization challenges marketers around the world.

With the rise of social media, everything becomes more interactive, but also less controllable and confusing (Henning-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013).

Consumers can be overwhelmed by the wealth of information they are confronted with on a daily basis. In these circumstances, marketing campaigns need to be more creative, authentic and emotional than ever to attract people's attention (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Viral Marketing, an upgraded version of e-WOM and one of the effective technique of digital marketing, is always receiving attention from many marketers and businesses since the appearance of e-WOM in the early 2000s because of many reasons. While traditional forms of advertising like television advertising, newspaper ads and radio advertising are expensive and time-limited, online advertising helps companies easily attract customers at low cost or even at almost no cost. That's why most companies today use social media channels and the Internet as a way to spread their messages. Recently, newborn communication channels, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, penetrate most of online users and are potential places to approach new prospects. Online users tend to share on their networks what they find interesting, fascinating, humorous or shocking (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). The difference is that they are not asked to share the content, but they are willing to send the content because they believe their networks might also be interested in the topic. Viral content turns to be a creative way for companies to advertise products and services, as it can reach millions of people in a matter of days. Compared to traditional marketing methods, viral marketing can be presented under many intelligent and attractive content. The transmission forms may come from video clips, interactive flash games, ad games (advergame), eBooks, brand-

able software, images, text messages, emails, websites, an attention-grabbing event or contest. Usually, a viral marketing campaign is considered successful if it can get people excited and unconsciously spread it to friends, family and colleagues by performing various actions such as posting, mentioning, sharing or blogging about the content-related topic.

Once businesses started to apply viral marketing into practice, they soon realized that a multitude of factors should be taken into consideration to develop a well-prepared plan such as viral contents (messages, image to deliver to customers) (Fill & Turnbull, 2016), which platform should they use, how to allocate the budget for each channel and how they can integrate the viral campaigns into their business strategies...etc. As viral marketing is a type of marketing that arises from the internet and social networks, this marketing technique takes advantage of social networks and, in general, any form of electronic communication, to achieve the objectives of a company or a brand. Generally these objectives are based on achieving the recognition of a brand or a product. The formula of this campaign mechanism is similar to the spread of a virus: communication is created and social networks, mobile services, blogs and, in general, all types of compatible communication on the Internet are used to 'spread' the brand message to end users. The basic idea is to generate a story that attracts the public, that is unusual or that arouses some sort of emotion. In this way, people will not perceive it as a type of

advertising or promotion, but as a story created for the public, therefore they are willing to recommend to their friends and social profiles. If the company or brand achieves this objective, it will trigger users that willingly share their messages, generate product visibility, exchange experiences, improve the corporate image or even increase consumption.

In recent years, a multitude of viral marketing campaigns have been generated since, the reason businesses start favoring this technique because it has certain advantages, especially a lower cost compared to other forms of communication, an appropriate response from users, achieve a certain position in the minds of consumers, achieve greater interaction with them and the possibility of attracting new customers at a low cost. It must be remembered that the Internet has changed the way in which companies interact with their public. If consumers' opinions are positive, both the economic and intangible benefits of the company can be excessive. However, on the contrary, if they are negative, the image of the brand or the company may be damaged and even reduce sales. In order to help understand how and why a viral marketing campaign can be a double-edged sword, many researches are conducted in previous time. They explain how a viral marketing campaign, however effective, can become detrimental and risky for a firm even though all of the theoretical steps are followed. Marketers can partially try to avoid undesirable consequences with caution and good management of the operations,

but much of it steps out of the sphere of control: the understanding of the message by customers and the size of the virus spread are two unpredictable phenomena. Thus, understanding which factors contribute to the success of a campaign and how to implement it in an appropriate way is necessary to every marketer and businesses.

1.2. Research questions

In general, this paper contributes to address these objectives:

1. Examine and identify the factors that impact on the success of a viral marketing advertising
2. How to apply influence success factors on a viral campaign

Rather than seeking consumer insight through survey research or qualitative methodologies, this research study the actual factors that were shared by analyzing the three successful viral campaigns in 20s century in different geographic: the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge in American, Dove – Real Beauty with global targeted and Generali - Live the life you desire for Vietnam market — guide our understanding of why messages go viral and what factors impact on the success of each campaign.

This study is made up of five chapters. The first chapter includes the introduction and the objective of this research. The second chapter presents related literature review, defines the different theoretical concepts surrounding the subject such as

word of mouth, viral marketing and its relevant success factors. The third chapter contains the methodology that will be applied for this research. Chapter four indicates the author's analysis and result. Finally, in the last chapter, the management recommendations, the conclusion and the limits of this research will be exposed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The evaluation of digital advertising

Advertising has undergone a major transformation over the past decade. There are two main periods that characterize this evolution. The period before the internet and the other after the internet. Mass media dominated the pre-Internet era, including television, radio, and print media (Ghose & Yang, 2009). These methods do not deliver their message exclusively to their potential customers, but to the entire audience of these media. Since the Internet was discovered in the 1990s with the growth of Internet users and available technologies, new forms of advertising have emerged and are beginning to shift the market share of advertising from traditional media to online advertising. In recent years, Internet advertising has positioned itself as an effective and indispensable marketing strategy due to its high visibility and reasonable costs (Helm, 2000). However, with the accelerated growth rate of online advertising, customers are bombarded with too much annoying and intrusive online advertising. Jon Simpson pointed out that people in the US see an average of about 4000 ads a day (Jon Simpson, 2017). Permanent exposure to such information leads to an excessive stimulation or saturation effect for a part of the viewer (Muoz et al, 2018). Faced with an advertising oversaturation, consumers increasingly rely on credible recommendations from their networks when making purchasing decisions. "We live in a world where consumers actively resist

marketing. So it's imperative to stop marketing at people. The idea is to create an environment where consumers will market to each other" (Seth & Malcolm, 2010). Companies are therefore no longer only in product competition, but also in the communication competition for the attention of modern consumers. It is necessary and important to find new ways to differentiate and promote products / services and reach the consumer without making them feel intrusive and uncomfortable.

New media platforms and the emergence of peer-to-peer networks are bringing people closer, also pulling word-of-mouth to the web, which provides an easy way to connect and acquire information inside the acquaintance network with just one click. Since the beginning of the 21st century, a new form of marketing called viral marketing has emerged to exploit this trend. The aim of viral marketing is to encourage consumers to voluntarily spread a message of communication on their personal networks by providing them with informative and amusing content. Initially, advertising companies distribute the content of the message, and ideally consumers take over the transmission process. Viral marketing works particularly successfully under Web 2.0 conditions. Social networks like Facebook and content sharing communities like YouTube have become pivotal platforms for disseminating advertising. This tendency forms the basis for raising awareness of the product or brand image through viral effects (Huang, Chen & Wang, 2012, p. 6).

2.2. Definition of viral marketing

In order to define viral marketing, it is necessary to trace back the concept of word of mouth. Word of Mouth, or WOM for short, is an important classical form of transmission of information to people from the old age. In today's modern world, word-of-mouth communication is considered “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service’ (Arndt 1967, p. 3). Companies make use of this phenomenon since these recommendations arise spontaneously based on customers’ experiences and can be perceived as an honest, valuable and trusted sources of information for consumers. Lately, with the development of digital devices and the Internet, word of mouth has gone digitally and turned into electronic word of mouth, social platforms quickly spread e-WOM to a group of friends or even strangers around the Internet. Viral marketing is an upgraded version of e-WOM, in which the company initially triggers the message with the aim of encouraging its consumers to spread brand messages further.

The term viral marketing was first mentioned in Jeffrey Rayport's 1996 article "The Virus of Marketing," which implied the possibility of spreading news like the spread of a virus. The term became more popular after 1997 thanks to the Hotmail campaign, in which Hotmail put a signature under every email sent suggesting a Hotmail subscription. As a result, Hotmail has gained 12 million users in less than two years of campaigning. In 1997, Steve Jurvetson defined viral marketing as any

marketing mechanism that can amplify and accelerate word of mouth in the digital space (Kirby, 2012, p. 8). Word of mouth was the first form of viral marketing, using the principle of spontaneous human communication in daily life: people share information about what they have used and what they find satisfactory with their acquaintances, and use influential stories to promote the dissemination of certain products / services or rumors (Mindcomet Corporation, 2008).

According to Cruz, D and Fill, C (2008), there are many reasons why consumers like to talk about the products or services they have used, perhaps because they want to share shopping experiences with other consumers or simply want to talk about issues related to a brand's reputation (Cruz & Fill, 2008). Then, with the rapid growth of the Internet and social networks, Buzz Marketing appeared as version 2.0 of word of mouth: everyone discussed and transmitted information based on a prepared script. This scenario could be written by the company, or it could be a coincidence that suddenly occurs when it arouses the interest of online communities. Over a decade, several concepts of viral marketing have been proposed. Kotler (2007, p. 199), defined viral marketing as "an Internet version of marketing, word-of-mouth e-mail, or other marketing actions that are so contagious that the customer wants to share with their friends". Godin (2008) considered viral marketing as "an idea that spreads, and an idea that, as it spreads, actually helps market your business or cause" (Godin, 2008), while Sickels believed that viral marketing encourages honest communication between customer networks (Sickels,

2008, p.48). In the book "Advertising and Societies: Global Issues," the authors stressed that this tactic encourages people to share brand content, increasing the likelihood of exponential growth in the reach and influence of the message (Frith and Mueller, 2010, p. 237). It is also argued that "the effects of this type of marketing are like a virus - one person does it, then another and another until the word has spread through communities" (Frith & Mueller, 2010, p. 237).

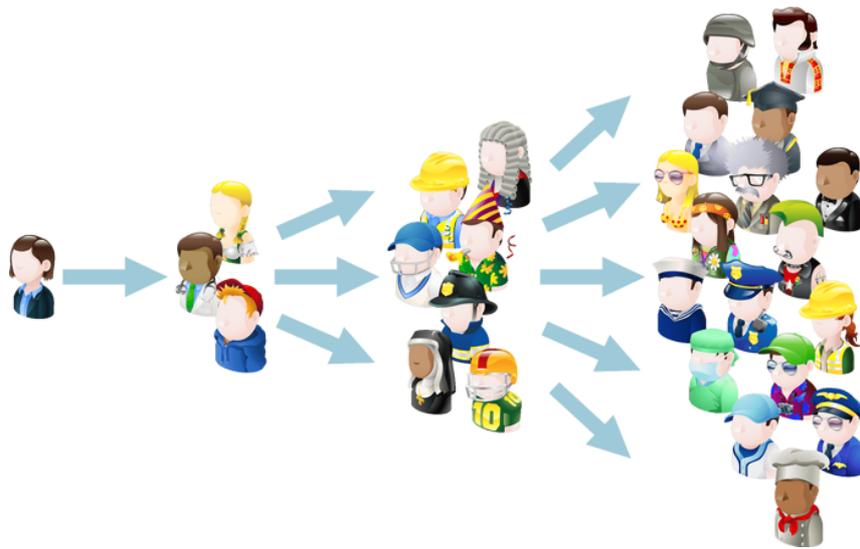


Table 1: Viral marketing mechanism - Source: BrandVietnam

Essentially, viral marketing in practice is a marketing message designed to spread from one person to another. This is done by encouraging or rewarding individuals who share content with their counterparts. The viral marketing campaign does not

require the company's product or service to be exceptional or outstanding. Instead, the marketing campaign itself must stand out (Mindcomet Corporation, 2008). Therefore, a company with average product and service quality can still make a profit if it has an effective viral marketing campaign.

2.3. Viral Marketing classifications

In Sweeney's book published in 2006, viral marketing is divided into three categories, "1) word-of-mouth; 2) 'pass it on' concept; and 3) product- or service-based viral marketing." while according to Mueller (2010), there are four main forms of viral marketing: 1) emails, 2) facilitated viral marketing, 3) incentive-based viral marketing, and 4) web-linked viral marketing. Emails are distinguished as the basic medium for viral marketing when the content or email attachment can stimulate recipients to forward the messages to others. Facilitated viral marketing is a strategy whereby companies add the call-to-action link such as "Send an email to your friend" or their commercial websites to gain more contacts or reach potential audiences by inviting them to join. Incentive-based viral marketing is linked to reward systems, where online users are incentivized to share the news. Web-linked viral marketing involves the act of sharing links on online platforms, such as online website publishers, discussion forums, and social networking sites. Mueller (2010) remarks that the latter tactic has become increasingly preferred over other methods in recent years.

Beneke (2010) also provides a more detailed analysis of the various types of viral marketing. Beneke (2010) divides viral marketing mainly into the following categories: pass-on marketing, gossip-based viral marketing, incentive-based viral marketing and disguised viral messages. Passing-on marketing or passing on viral messages is an online technique used to designate the online/offline information that can be passed on to others. Gossip-based viral marketing is appealing information from trusted or untrusted sources that can spread quickly regionally, nationally or internationally, depending on the attractiveness of the topic. Incentive-based viral marketing is initiated by companies. This type provides online users with extrinsic incentive motivation to forward the messages. Disguised viral messages do not display the name of the company or the type of products advertised in order to pique customers' curiosity and motivate them to search for the brand themselves.

Clarke & Flaherty (2010), on the other hand, proposed an alternative classification for viral marketing that takes into account the degree of customer anticipation in the viral message transmission strategy. In particular, viral marketing was divided into two groups: low integration strategies and high integration strategies. In some other papers, it has been referred to as passive and active viral marketing. The best known example of low-integration/ passive viral marketing is the case of hot-mail

campaign, where the message is delivered to the audience while their services are being used. The same tactic has been used with the "Send to your friend" or "Share" button that appears in seasonal online greeting cards or blogs that online users read daily. This tactic requires no motivation to encourage customers to transfer the viral messages to their networks and the first push for the spread of viruses is initiated by the company (Jurvetson & Draper, 1997). Highly integrated viral marketing strategies or active viral marketing, on the other hand, require active participation of customers in the dissemination process. Such actions can include downloading applications, discussing, sharing or reviewing the product (Godin, 2008).

2.4. Common transmission methods of Viral Marketing

The development of new technologies and the Internet has enabled an unprecedented escalation in electronic communication and, consequently, viral marketing. The Internet is one of the factors for increasing the speed of transmission of data between people and entities. Thanks to the Internet, viral marketing has expanded its development and the influence of word of mouth. Marketing no longer has borders, nowadays a video, an e-mail, a message that goes around the world in a fraction of a second through many methods:

Social networks: This channel is the most common and popular vehicle to advertise viral marketing today. With the help of social media, companies can distribute mass content to a larger audience in a short time.

Mobile Instant Messenger Application (MIM): identified as platforms that allow users to exchange real-time free text messages (Church & Oliveira, 2013), MIM offers users convenience and is widely embraced by young people (Deng, Lu, Deng & Zhang, 2010). Some notable examples of MIM are Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Viber, Line and WeChat. In terms of transmitting viral messages, this tool can facilitate dissemination thanks to real-time communication.

Opinion leaders: Opinion leaders are experts or specialized people in a particular area who can reach and influence hundreds, thousands or even millions of consumers with their statements and recommendations. This medium is perceived as a source of credibility and is highly exposed to consumers (Roger, 2003).

Sharing platforms: Sharing platforms, including photo sharing sites such as Pinterest, Instagram and video sharing sites such as YouTube, Dailymotion, can play an important role in a viral marketing campaign. They increase the interactivity of campaigns around content that can be shared, as these platforms allow fans and followers to interact, share and discuss the subject.

Discussion forum: can be considered an effective tool for the dissemination of electronic word of mouth, as it is specialized and can gather expertise from online users with considerable influence in the interactive environment.

Blogs: Blogs are websites whose content is generated by an Internet user and can therefore be defined as personal websites. The creation of a blog can also be carried

out by a company or association. In this case, the site becomes a personal space with the freedom to express one's voice, recommendation, or personal ideas.

E-mails: E-mail is the simplest form of communication on the Internet. It is based on the transmission of electronic messages (electronic mail or e-mail) via a computer network between a recipient and a sender. Although they are recognized by Internet users as outdated, as many studies emphasize that recipients consider emails to be "spam" or "junk" and delete them without reading (Phelps et al., 2004), companies still use this method in the form of e-mail marketing..

2.5. Benefits and drawbacks of Viral Marketing

2.5.1. Benefits of viral marketing

Viral marketing is a valuable opportunity for businesses thanks to its advantages. First, viral marketing is a communication technique that famous for its diffusion characteristic and transmission method. Its principle is to send a message over the Internet in different formats to certain target groups - which in turn transmit it to their networks, thanks to the contagious power of information. Peer-to-peer transmission plays a crucial role in the functioning of viral marketing (Dobele, et al., 2005). This information transmission technique enables the message to be spread quickly, because as soon as the target audience is interested in the message, it is passed on to as many people as possible, so that the message can spread

exponentially. Godin (2011) states that a viral marketing campaign can achieve in a year what radio can achieve in 38 years. .

Second, viral marketing is cost-effective. Welker (2002) states that viral marketing is an inexpensive and fast way to distribute content. The cost of a viral marketing campaign is much lower than that of a traditional communications campaign (Helm, 2000, Fairbank, 2009). There are several reasons for this: first, unlike a traditional advertising campaign, the initial audience is gained "for free" through the viral phenomenon of the campaign, e.g. by mass sending e-mails (in the early stages of the campaign). Similarly, the cost of a viral marketing campaign seems modest in comparison to the prospects achieved. For example, an ad in a very specialized magazine is not expensive, but the prospects are negligible. Thus, one of the main attractions of viral marketing for advertisers is the ability to achieve the goals of awareness and persuasion at low unit costs. Viral marketing can achieve exceptional business results with considerably reduced budgets. It is therefore suitable for small businesses that do not have a large budget. It is also suitable for brands that have a special relationship with their customers, because the customers want to support them (Kotler et al., 2007).

Another advantage of viral marketing is its interactive character. Interactivity is the ability of Internet users to communicate directly or send an e-mail, express an opinion or critique, discuss in discussion forums, play games, etc. Viral marketing can work in various interactive formats such as video clips, interactive flash games,

advertising games, etc., which allows customers to interact with brands. This interactive character distinguishes viral marketing from traditional marketing and transforms the audience from a simple passive audience, as in traditional advertising, into an active audience.

Alternatively, companies can use viral marketing strategies to solve legal and privacy problems by avoiding misleading messages that are referred to as "spam." Moreover, viral marketing allows companies to sustain audience penetration, as they have access to different groups of audiences through social contact (Helm, 2000) and potential customers are effectively targeted (Dobele, et al., 2005).

2.5.2. Drawbacks of viral marketing

Viral marketing is a powerful communication tool, but it also carries some risks when the campaign does not work properly. In many cases, viral marketing can backfire and damage the company's image (Mindcomet Corporation, 2008).

The greatest risk of viral marketing is "brand fatigue." This happens when consumers are bombarded with too many unwanted messages or unwanted advertisements so that they get bored (or worse, annoyed) with a brand (Nantel, 2011). These Internet users become less receptive and responsive, and may even pass on negative messages about the company to their surroundings. One of the typical examples is the film "The Blair Witch Project II," which suffered a total breakdown. After the success of the first episode of the film, Internet users are

uninterested in when the viral process for the second episode restarts. In the case of incentivized viral marketing, there are chances that online users are willing to "spam" or "pollute" social platforms to get the rewards (Fairbank, 2008). People are annoyed by this type of sharing and easily turn away from the brand, as the sharing does not contain useful information for the recipient (Chaffey, D., 2003) and the message is shared with the target with whom the company would rather not be associated (Miller, R., & Lammas, N., 2010)

The second risk associated with viral marketing is that it is difficult to control. As soon as companies start controlling their messages on social networks, consumers tend to perceive the information as untrustworthy sources (Scott, D., 2007). A major problem with viral marketing strategies is insufficient control over the result of the created advertisement. This phenomenon becomes uncontrollable once it spreads among enough people and the company cannot prevent people from sharing or commenting on the ads (Langner, 2009). There is a high probability that virally shared content will be distorted by online users into parody or unwanted content. This distortion can also be unintentional, but can lead to catastrophic results (Nantel, 2011). The most prominent example is the fake Ericsson email, which stated that Ericsson would offer a free mobile phone if the message was forwarded to more than ten friends. Ericsson failed to control the situation and ignore the Internet users who participated in the fake campaign.

The third risk of viral marketing may also be its excessive success (Couturier, 2014). Companies become victims of their own success when they receive greater uncontrollable attention from consumers, but production or service is not scalable to meet consumer demand. In this case, consumers have unsatisfactory experiences, and they have a negative impact on the reputation of the company (Fairbank, 2008). The last risk is when a viral campaign message unintentionally or intentionally violates the notions of ethics (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004), cultural beliefs and practices, or civil rights. Indeed, today's consumers prefer products or brand messages that represent symbolic values. However, some viral marketing campaigns have not complied with these values and have thus failed. The Nivea case is a good example. They delivered a deodorant advertisement with the message "White is purity" to the Middle East, which was considered discriminatory and racially insensitive.

2.6. Elements of Viral Marketing

According to Wilson (2002), there are 6 main characteristics of a viral campaign.

Give products or services away for free: "Free" is the strongest word in marketing vocabulary. Many viral campaigns aim to give away a free product or service to attract customers' attention. "Cheap" or "inexpensive" can generate a huge interest, but "free" usually makes the offer more irresistible. Therefore, companies have a pool of target customers, they do not earn money immediately, but they can seduce

potential customers with enticing offers later on. One of the notable practices that is common nowadays is to offer a free trial version of the software program to show customers that the free version does not have as powerful features as the paid version, and encourage potential customers to upgrade to an advanced version.

Ensure effortless transmission to others: viral marketing works the way viruses spread. A virus reproduces and spreads if it finds an appropriate environment. The medium used to spread branding messages must support the transmission and replication of messages. In the age of the Internet, social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are ideal channels to effortlessly share the content, as they offer the possibility of quick, simple, and free transmission. From Wilson's perspective (2002), the message should be concise and clear so that a wider audience can remember it. The more complex the message, the greater the possibility of potential distortions in the transmission and understanding of the message.

It scales easily from small to large: in order to successfully spread new viral messages, the delivery method should be able to scale quickly from small to very large. Scalability is the ability of a campaign to increase or reduce its output without changing its fundamental characteristics or essential elements of the campaign. For example, if the campaign successfully reaches one million viewers and leads to a significant increase in website traffic, it is critical to quickly expand the service features of the website to ensure an optimal service function.

Common motivations and behaviors are exploited: people want to be popular and accepted by their peers. A competent viral marketing plan uses people's motivations, aspirations and behaviors to pass on the message to the community.

It takes advantage of existing communication networks: people are social beings. Sociologists estimate that each person has an average close network of 8-12 people between friends, relatives, and colleagues, while the daily relationships that are formed can be hundreds or thousands, depending on the social status of the person. Viral marketing harnesses the potential of these personal networks to exponentially multiply the spread of brand messages.

It uses other resources to spread the message: the most creative viral marketing plans use existing resources to raise awareness. For example, through affiliate programs, a company can place its name, logo, or link on others' websites to stimulate visitors.

According to Wilson (2000), effective viral marketing tactics use the majority of the six principles. Depending on the strategic plan of the company, these components are used differently. They have the choice of including all six elements or only two, but the viral campaign can be more effective if companies can use more elements.

2.7. Fundamental factors of a successful viral campaign

Studies show that there are mechanisms that more than others facilitate word of mouth. “Virality isn’t luck. It’s not magic. And it’s not random. There’s a science behind why people talk and share. A recipe. A formula, even.” (Jonah Berger, 2013).

Several authors have attempted to determine the rules for a successful viral marketing campaign. Kaplan & Haenlein (2011) point out three basic rules that are necessary for word of mouth to emerge via social media. These rules can be summed up in one phrase: "Send the right message to the right messengers in the right environment". The first rule is to send the "right" message: according to Kaplan & Haenlein (2011), a good message should be easy to remember and interesting. Dobele et al. (2005) state that the message should be funny and/or intriguing to be viral. It must "capture" the recipients' attention to be different from all the other messages they are exposed to on a daily basis. These authors state that the successful viral marketing campaigns include content that triggers emotions in the receptors, such as the following primary emotions: Surprise, Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, Disgust. However, Bertrand (2000) argues that recipients are only interested in content that provides financial benefit, entertainment or information. The second rule is to target the "good messengers", namely opinion leaders. These are individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic, engage in proactive

discussions with other consumers, and provide information dissemination (Feick & Price, 1987). According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2011), one has to go through them so that the message is then passed on to other consumers. These opinion leaders, referred to as "influencers", serve as relays to others through their attitude of active listening and understanding. The third condition recommends being in the "right environment". This condition refers to two sub-conditions: The first states that messengers will convey the message only if they believe the content to be original and unknown to all. The second condition is to be in the right place at the right time. That is, to be lucky. Kaplan & Haenlein (2011) emphasize that when the previous rules are met, there is always a part of chance that cannot be predicted, it is luck. In the view of Angela Dobele (2005), effective viral marketing campaigns can deliver an engaging message involving creativity, fun and intrigue to promote ease of use and exposure, use reliable sources to target and utilize technology combinations during the campaign. According to Maria et al (2008), five type of viral marketing factors that may critically influence the success of viral marketing campaigns are identified. These factors are the overall structure of the campaign, the characteristics of the product or services, the content of the message, the characteristics of the diffusion and the peer-to-peer Information contents.

Success critical factors	Aspects	Literature review	References
Audience Target	Audience size	Reach diverse audiences through social contactsts	Helm (2000)
	Audience characteristic	Audience traits influencing the spread of messages	Norman and Russell (2006)
Message content	Content	Message characteristics including content & structure play a role in persuasion and help to change the attitudes and beliefs of an individual or group by transmitting a message	Bettinghaus (1980) & Kaplan & Haenlein (2011)
	Structure		
Transmission channel	Platforms used	Users transmit brand messages voluntarily through internet	Dobele, et al. (2005)
	Sources credibility	Sources credibility significant impacts the sharing motives	Wu and Wang (2011)
Diffusion characteristic	Exponential growth	Success viral campaigns present a speedy & exponential adoption rate within a short time	Welker, 2002 & Rogers (2003)
	Speed		
Product characteristic	Suitability	Product types may influence the sharing mechanism	Park and Lee (2008)
Overall campaign structure	Ethical, legal and culture	Campaigns violate ethical, legal and culture aspects can cause negative effects after launching, thus, need to revise before implementing.	(Maria et al, 2008) (Dobele, et al., 2005)

Table 2: Critical factors for success viral marketing campaigns literature review summary

To answer the questions what factors influencing the viral marketing success, this paper will investigate 6 factors: target audience, viral message content, transmission method, diffusion characteristic, product/ service characteristic and the campaign structure in overall.

2.7.1. Audience target characteristic

Norman and Russell (2006) found that a person's involvement in the message topic predicts the spread of the viral message. The level of engagement is explained by the relationship between the person and the message, i.e. the degree of interest and intensity of motivation (Ratchford & Vaughn, 1989). Also, gender affects the way people communicate. Apparently, women communicate differently from men (Gefen & Ridings, 2005), they use the Internet to provide and receive support, their communication focuses on cooperation and collaboration (Yates, 2001), and they are more emotional in their online transactions (Dittmar, Long, & Meek, 2004) while men use the Internet to strengthen or maintain their social positions (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008). Alternatively, research has shown that women are more likely to use e-mail to maintain contact and forward viral messages to their friends and acquaintances than men (Phelps et al. 2004), and are also more likely to use social networks (Hargittai et al, 2008).

Ajzen (1991) also pointed out people who receive the same message can respond differently depending on their personality. Extroverts, for example, are more likely to use word of mouth, feel comfortable talking to others, and are more likely to convince and influence others (Goldberg, 1990). Furthermore, extroverts tend to take initiative, actively present in front of people and select topics for conversation while they are in a group (Balthazard, Potter, & Warren, 2004). As has been consistently noted in previous academic literature, mistrust of a medium can be attributed to personality traits (Das et al., 2003), extroverts have a higher disposition to trust (Tan & Sutherland, 2004), leading to a tendency to trust the Internet more easily and to spread word of mouth.

2.7.2. Message content characteristic

The characteristics of the message are subdivided into two parts: the content and the structure of the message (Mowen & Minor, 2001). The content of the message includes all the strategies that are used to communicate the idea. This includes rhetoric (e.g. rhyme, pun, metaphor, etc.), the complexity of the message, the type of emotion (e.g. humor or fear), etc. Message structure involves the organization of the message. Message characteristics play a role in persuasion and help to change the attitudes and beliefs of an individual or group by transmitting a message (Bettinghaus, 1980).

In the marketing literature, some studies have concentrated particularly on the effective viral advertising's content. They believed the attractive and memorable content can facilitate virality (Phelps et al. 2004). Meanwhile, advertising emotions can enhance the data processing and increases the memorability of viral content (Phelps et al. 2004), thus, increase the sharing tendency. The emotion of advertising content is the general affective state perceived by the audience that the advertising intends to convey. It can be made by the lines in commercials, the sounds, the images and actors' facial expressions etc. Emotional value is an influential factor in the sharing of content. Eckler & Bolls (2011) were interested in the role of emotions in viral communication. They concluded that the effects of emotion are often more important than the product itself. A viral video that successfully reaches many consumers might be applied for an ordinary product, but must contain a "wow" factor.

Some scholars argue that negative information is more likely to be spread out (Godes et al. 2005), others advocate that positive emotion will facilitate information propagation more. Berger & Milkman (2012) tested that positive content is more likely to go viral. In the context of viral video advertising, Eckler & Bolls (2011) investigated the role of different emotional tones (pleasant, unpleasant, coactive) in videos about consumer attitudes and forwarding intentions. They found that a pleasant emotional tone has the strongest effect on the attitude of consumers and

stimulates the transmission of messages, while an unpleasant emotional tone has the weakest effect. Given that sharing online content often involves self-expression, sharing positive content tends to have a positive impact on the sender's identity and is therefore more likely to happen (Berger & Milkman 2012). Consequently, it is possible that the valence of emotions (i.e. positive or negative emotions) plays a significant role in influencing online ad sharing.

2.7.3. Transmission characteristic

Today's Internet is largely defined by user participation and interaction. Social networks and communities have evolved from this participation of a broad public. On Web 2.0 sites such as Facebook, Wikipedia, and YouTube, content is even created solely by users. Liske states that advertisers on the Internet today depend on the "goodwill of the community" (Liske, 2010, p. 17) in order to be noticed with their messages at all. Therefore, in order to choose the right channels and benefit from viral effects by network users, it is necessary to understand the actors and relationships within these networks. Thus, the cohesion in a social network is significantly influenced by the nature of its internal social relationships. In network research, a distinction can be made between weak links (Rosen, 2002, p. 82) and strong links (Klinger, 2006, p. 52). The former exist between casual acquaintances or casual friendships, while the latter symbolize close relationships with family and friends. Currently, each individual is a member of various homogeneous social

groups or clusters. The so-called primary groups include friends, family and work colleagues who are in regular contact and interact regularly. In the secondary groups, for example in clubs or religious communities, the members have a looser contact. Within the various clusters, news can spread comparatively quickly due to the use of similar information sources. This creates information barriers for other clusters that have not yet been infected by a message. The challenge for the emergence of an epidemic is therefore to establish connections between the different clusters. By connecting users on the Internet, the barriers between clusters can be bridged much more quickly. The "weak ties" have a special role to play. They have numerous loose contacts and tend to be located decentral at the periphery of such clusters. In this way, they can bring about the flow of communication from outside and thus the transfer of information between the various clusters. Within social networks like Facebook, such contacts can be maintained with little effort: the Internet creates millions of shortcuts from weak connections between clusters. In addition, the credibility of the transmission source is also taken into account when distribute the message as Wu and Wang (2011) defined message source credibility as one of the important features in viral implementation. How social contacts perceive the sender's sources will reflect their attitude towards the message, thus, influence their sharing motives.

2.7.4. Diffusion characteristic

The theory of innovation diffusion (Rogers, 2003) describes the diffusion of innovations in social systems, in which innovations are not only new products, but can also be a new viral campaign (Langner, 2009). There are four main aspects that influence the dissemination: the innovation itself, communication channels, time and a social system

The first crucial factor is the innovation itself which including the innovation and the adopter, in which the subjective perception of the adopter (Rogers, 2003, p. 12) or the recipient of messages is very crucial. The author defines “diffusion” as follows: "Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through specific channels over time among members of a social system" (Rogers, 2003). For example, if a viral message is considered subjectively novel by the recipient, it represents an innovation for him and creates attention and is passed on to other contacts. However, if it is not considered subjectively innovative, the diffusion process is interrupted. Putting in this context, the content message can consider as the innovation subject. Along with innovation itself, communication channels or transmission medium are another key element in the dissemination of innovation. Besides the channels of the mass media, interpersonal channels are an efficient means of dissemination which may speed up the diffusion process of viral campaign, especially if the interaction partners have similar sociodemographic

characteristics (Rogers, 2003). Another element Rogers (2003) cites is the duration of the innovation process. This ranges from the perception of the innovation to interest, evaluation and adoption or rejection of the innovation (Rogers, 2003 , p. 20). The period varies depending on personal, product and environmental factors. For example, time pressure, negative attitudes to viral messages, or long loading times due to server congestion can hinder the adoption process. Moreover, Rogers (2003) characterizes the social system as the space in which the diffusion process takes place. Factors influencing this are the prevailing norms, the social structure and the significance of certain individuals. The latter include, for example, opinion leaders who, thanks to their expertise, can influence other social contacts' attitudes and behaviors.

The model presented according to Rogers (2003) was established as an explanatory approach for the dissemination of innovative products (Liske, 2010), but appears to be only partially suitable for the dissemination of viral messages. Viral campaign goods are generally available free of charge, so risk perception hardly plays a role. Nevertheless, the implication of the selection of innovators in the context of the initial dissemination of viral messages according to Rogers "model (2003) can be seen as a relevant recommendation for action in practice (Reiter, 2008, p. 72).

In general, a qualified viral campaign should have a positive diffusion characteristics - the campaign must acquire a transmission in a rapid diffusion rate

as the success viral can reach customers in a short time (Welker, 2002) and obtain the fast rate of adoption the innovation from online user (Rogers, 2003).

2.7.5. Product/ service characteristic

In order to build an interactive marketing strategy, the marketer need to understand the impact of word of mouth, it's not only in terms of the credibility of the source, but also in terms of the configuration of the message. The configuration of the message influences the effect of word of mouth. In other words, word of mouth is determined according to the characteristics of the message transmitted. The message can trigger negative or positive word of mouth, depending on whether consumers are motivated to buy the product or not. In this context, the effectiveness of electronic word of mouth varies according to the type of product (Park and Lee, 2008). By classifying products into two types, experience products and search products (Nelson 1970), the author understand that the word of mouth effect has a different influence on Internet users. Experience goods are products characterized by features that can only be defined at the time of purchase and use of the product. The only way to obtain complete information about the product is to either acquire the lived experiences of other consumers or to buy the product and experience the experience for yourself (holidays, concerts, language lessons, etc.). Research goods are products that consumer tend to carry out a careful research before purchasing (books, CDs, etc.). The characteristics of the product influence the way Internet

users use word of mouth. According to Part and Lee's study, Internet users generate more word of mouth for experience products than for search products. The fact that the collection of information for an experience product depends on the experiences of others encourages Internet users to create blogs to discuss or leave comments under the listings of these products on the Internet. Internet users who want information on experience products can consult blogs or sections where other consumers share their experiences. For instance, online user who wants to buy a one week European tour will look for the quality agency through the online recommendation websites, blog reviews or shared post and comments of other Internet users who have experienced it before.

2.7.6. Overall campaign structure characteristic

Whether distributed locally or deployed internationally, viral campaigns are not exempt from the legal requirements, ethical standards and culture values that apply in each country. These are dimensions that should not be overlooked as it potentially can be a risk for viral marketing campaign (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004), especially as there are many aspects to consider, from the optimization of email addresses to the respect of privacy, from the retention period of the data collected to the marketing to partners or the design and viral content should meet consumers' culture values - everything must necessarily be the subject of a control before the final design of the viral campaign's release. Otherwise, there will be a setback for the image of the

brand that the companies wanted to promote. One of a notable example of a failure marketing campaign which violated one of these aspects is the Chopstick ad campaign of Docle and Gabana, in which the video ad demonstrated Asian people eating pizza and Italian sweet rolls with chopstick, it attracted negative public attentions and has sparked controversy on Chinese social media. The ad was claimed to be discriminatory according to Chinese perspective and Docle and Gabana almost lost the China market (David, 2020).

CHAPTER 3: FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research method and conceptual framework

This study is characterized as an intrinsic qualitative content analysis method in combination with the secondary analysis data collected from third party reliable sources to define the critical factors that impact the success of viral campaigns.

Qualitative case study is a research technique that uses multiple data sets to examine a phenomenon within a specific context, illuminating the different facets of the phenomenon with different lenses to uncover multiple aspects of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). An in-depth investigation takes place in its natural setting and with appreciation of the context will be take place (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). The case study approach is acceptable when the aim is to "gain an in-depth understanding of the situation" and when the "interest is in process rather than outcome, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (Merriam, 1998, p.19) and it works well when there are existing theories on the subject (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 147).

Based on theory reviews in the previous chapter, the author summarized and created a framework to analyze the case study as follows:

Success critical factors	Aspects	Case analysis questions
Audience Target	Audience size	Is the audience size enough to make a spread?
	Audience characteristic	Does the audience characteristic suitable to spread the message?
Diffusion characteristic	Exponential	Does the message spread quickly/ in short period of time among the audiences?
	Speed	Does the message spread to a right and wide audiences?
Message content	Content	Does the content creative enough to catch people attention? What kind of emotion used in the content message?
	Structure	Does the content structure easy to understand, engage and follow?
Product characteristic	Suitability	Does the product/ services marketed suitable for viral marketing tactic?
Transmission channel	Platforms used	What platforms used to transmit the viral message?
	Sources credibility	Does the message come from a credible source?
Overall	Ethical, legal and	Does the campaign meet the criteria of ethical

campaign structure	culture	standard, legal requirement and culture values in the targeted market?
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Table 3: Conceptual framework on key factors of a successful viral campaign

3.2. Campaign selections

The selection of the case study is the result of careful work and prolonged reflection. The author wants to conduct a limited and in-depth research, with the aim of being able to carry out a qualitative analysis that meets the methodological criteria and can answer the research question. Since there is no unanimous definition of what a viral phenomenon is, the case selection is based on several criteria to define virality, i.e. popularity, dissemination platform, number of views and year of publication. The first selection criterion in this context is that the viral phenomenon must have received significant media attention for at least two consecutive weeks through one of the following methods: television, radio, print media, or online newspapers. The second criterion is that the viral phenomenon must be operated in video format. Next, the people involved in the phenomenon must use the Internet as a dissemination medium. Also, the videos must have been released between 2010 and 2020 to ensure that the lessons learned thereafter are still applicable in the present. Finally, videos that have been viewed 10,000,000 times and shared more than 10,000 times are considered. However, the author does not qualify that the campaign has to be a major event that reverberates in many countries and affects

people of all ages. It could also be an event that only affects a specific target audience, age group, and geographic area, as long as the campaigns meet the above indicators. In addition, these cases should have a strong social and media impact so that the success factors can be studied concisely. The selection of our viral phenomena proved to be distinctive and special, as one was a fundraising campaign that took on an unexpected scale and was successful beyond initial expectations, while the other two were commercial viral videos that not only generated tremendous brand awareness but also had a financial impact after the campaign ended.

3.3. Data collection

In order to provide an informed and rounded perspective on the context of successful viral campaigns, data was collected from a variety of sources, including internal agency analysis reports, observations of online data, and previous case studies and campaign reports. According to (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 256), this type of information can serve as primary data to answer research questions. Yin (2003) believed that "a good case study ... uses as many sources as possible" even if it does not provide new corroboration or contradictory information (p. 85). First, this data consists of the videos posted on Generali and Dove's official YouTube/Facebook channel and consists of the promotional reports relevant to the empirical study in this paper. These reports may be case studies from third party agencies such as

Google, Mango Digital - the agency of Generali Vietnam and Ogilvy & Mather - the agency of Dove. Additional data from Generali was also collected from YouNet Media's SocialHeat - a social listening tool that assesses brand awareness and ranking based on four factors: Brand Mention Score , which is calculated based on the number of discussions & brand mentions, Sentiment Score - an indicator that measures brand/campaign affinity based on positive and negative social media, Buzz Score, which evaluates brand discussions based on total discussions generated online, and the final indicator - Audience Scale Score, which measures the reach of the message the campaign communicates to social media users based on the actual number of viewers a discussion generates. Further numerical data on the Ice Bucket Challenge and Dove campaigns can be obtained from online newspapers, previous empirical research, and online data available at the time the campaigns were conducted.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The three cases presented in the following section are remarkable examples of successful viral campaigns and represent a very special type of viral marketing campaign, as will certainly be fully presented in this section. The number of cases is sufficient considering the lack of empirical research in this area of science to date. These three cases will be examined and put into perspective by looking for underlying similarities, distinctions, and systemic relationships, and finally, further relevant findings.

4.1. Case 1: Dove Real Beauty Sketches

Case background

Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build brand love and loyalty• Turn beauty into a source of confidence, not anxiety, for women
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Produce a three minute video, Dove Real Beauty Sketches, which was uploaded in 25 languages to 46 Dove Youtube channels

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched video globally with the support of TrueView in-stream, TrueView in-search, YouTube homepage masthead, and search ads • Encouraged audience participation through YouTube brand channels, YouTube video responses, Twitter brand channel
Results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most watched online ad ever, according to Unilever, with over 163 million views globally 4.6 billion media impressions; reached 275,000 followers on Google+ • #1 on the Cannes YouTube Ads Leaderboard and won Titanium Grand Prix at 2013 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity

Finding that the way women judge their own beauty is often in extreme contrast to the perception of outsiders, more than half (54%) of women worldwide agree that they have a critic of their own beauty. In order to create a world in which beauty is a source of self-confidence and does not inspire fear or uncertainty, Dove conducted a social experiment to find the true cause. In April 2013, Dove released the campaign "Real Beauty Sketches" in collaboration with the agency Ogilvy Brazil,

which went viral on the Internet. The promotional video showed an experiment conducted by Dove in which a professional FPI forensic scientist drew a portrait of seven women based solely on their self-description while sitting behind a curtain that was invisible to him. After the session with the sketch artist, each woman was unexpectedly asked to spend a short time with someone completely stranger to her. The examiner then made sketches based on the description of the strangers. Surprisingly, at the end of the session there are two completely different portraits. The video was then launched on 46 different Dove YouTube channels and in 25 different languages.

Case analysis

Basically, Dove's core target audience profiles are young and middle-aged women around 25 - 45. However, the Dove campaign can appeal to women of all ages and ethnicities around the world. Obviously, this audience type tends to trust and share information on social media. In addition, this audience type was dominated by personal emotions when making purchase decisions. Based on the first criterion of the model, the target audience of this campaign is large enough and the characteristics of the audience can help to exploit the distribution. In fact, this campaign is a passive (commercial) viral video with the aim of promoting a consumer product.

The real soul of the message is not the commercial product, but the intention to encourage women around the world to embrace their true beauty and be more confident. The use of emotion is clear in this campaign. A mixture of shock, surprise, joy and sadness from the female interviewers runs throughout the video, bringing out the enthusiasm and motivation of the viewers. The commercial used the idea of "prove me, don't tell" and built the content under the thematic narrative form of storytelling. By having the interviewers express their own perspective through an experiment without directly telling anything, the content of the video becomes more compelling.

For this campaign, Dove opted for traditional communication methods and ran the campaign mainly online. Dove's official Facebook and YouTube accounts were the main distribution channels for the campaign. The video was uploaded to 46 Dove Youtube channels in 25 languages to spread globally. Dove also combined paid ads on YouTube and Google search ads to capture viewers' attention. Soon, the campaign received tremendous attention from online media and many celebrities. Consequently, distribution quickly expanded after its release on April 14. The campaign was extremely successful and quickly went viral, becoming the most viewed business message in YouTube's history. More than 15 million people watched the Dove video in the first 7 days (Avi, 2012). When it was re-uploaded on BuzzFeed on April 18, it was one of the 10 most popular videos on the platform.

AdAge reported that in the first ten days, it generated more than 30 million views and 660,000 shares on the Facebook platform (AdAge, 2013). By June 2013, the video had 163 million views worldwide, topped the YouTube ad rankings in Cannes and won the Titanium Grand Prix at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity (Think With Google, 2012). The brand received 90% positive responses to the campaigns across social platforms (Think With Google, 2012). Specifically, the campaign on the Dove US channel had 176,000 likes and 4,700 dislikes, as well as more than 10,000 comments (Youtube, 2021). To date, Real Sketches has nearly 180 million views worldwide (Dove, 2020). It should be noted that the Dove brand name only appears in the last 5 seconds of the video, precisely to emphasize that product promotion is not the goal of the video clip. There are no product references, but customers can still make a connection with the brand. In this case, the product feature does not affect the viral campaign because the company can find a way to increase brand loyalty and brand love by conveying positive messages to its customers.

Finally, there is no substantiated information that the campaign has violated any legal or ethical issues. There is some controversy about the social standards that the video was trying to manipulate people, as some people pointed out that the video lacked diversity, focused on a small group of women, or the advertisement seemed

to blame women instead of society. However, the video delivered such an emotional message and generally achieved its goals.

Success critical factors	Aspects	Case analysis questions
Audience Target	Audience size	Female
	Audience characteristic	Active on social media, emotion in making decision
Diffusion characteristic	Exponential	Exposure in 10 days with 30 millions views and 60k+ shares
	Speed	
Message content	Content	Inspiring women on self-acceptance
	Structure	Conduct the video under the experiment interview struture
Product characteristic	Suitability	Tangible and experience goods
Transmission channel	Platforms used	Youtube, Facebook, Twitter
	Sources credibility	Yes. The information source mainly comes from Dove official channels.

Overall campaign structure	Ethical, legal and culture	No findings about campaign problems with ethical, legal and culture issues.
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Table 4: Dove case summary

4.2. Case 2: ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

Case background

Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) disease • Fund raising for research on ALS disease.
Approach:	<p>Participants encourage to join a challenge in which people will pour an ice bucket over their head. The challenge need to be completed within 24 hours or the participants will donate to ALS association instead. They then nominates another 3 people to join.</p>
Results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 28 million people have partaken in the conversation of the challenge (Facebook Analytics, 2014)

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|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.4 million videos related to the ice bucket challenge have been shared on Facebook (Facebook Analytics, 2014) |
|--|--|

Case analysis

The campaign was launched with the aim of raising funds for the ALS Association and educating people about the disease ALS. The target audience of this campaign is public without any restriction of gender or demographic. Since the target audience is broad and sizeable, the campaign has high chances of reaching a large number of online users.

The campaign started spreading when Pete Frates, who was diagnosed with ALS in 2012, shared the challenge on his Twitter and it surprisingly spread to other social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Unlike the other two cases, this campaign is active viral marketing or high-integrity viral marketing because people are actively searching for and participating in the game. Unexpectedly, this viral phenomenon could generate voluntary participation from many global celebrities and key influencers such as Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates , singer

Justin Timberlake, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, Victoria Beckham, Donatella Versace and many more (. Thanks to the widespread and tremendous support from well-known celebrities, the challenge promptly received a lot of publicity, in famous TV shows and newspapers (Joseph, 2015). Internet users became aware of the challenge, imitated it, and forwarded it to their circles, spreading the phenomenon beyond the borders of the United States. In this case, then, the participation of opinion leaders plays an irreplaceable role in the process of conveying the message and spreading the cause exponentially. When it comes to the aspect of dissemination, the success of the Ice Bucket Challenge is undeniable. In terms of fundraising, \$62.5 million has been donated to the American ALS Association through the Challenge to date (as of August 23, 2014). That's \$60.1 million more than the same period last year. The campaign also achieved its second goal - if you look at the daily number of tweets about the "ALS Ice Bucket Challenge " or the increase in Google search volume for "amyotrophic lateral sclerosis", it is clear how massively people have become aware of this disease since August 2014 (see Table 5 and 6).

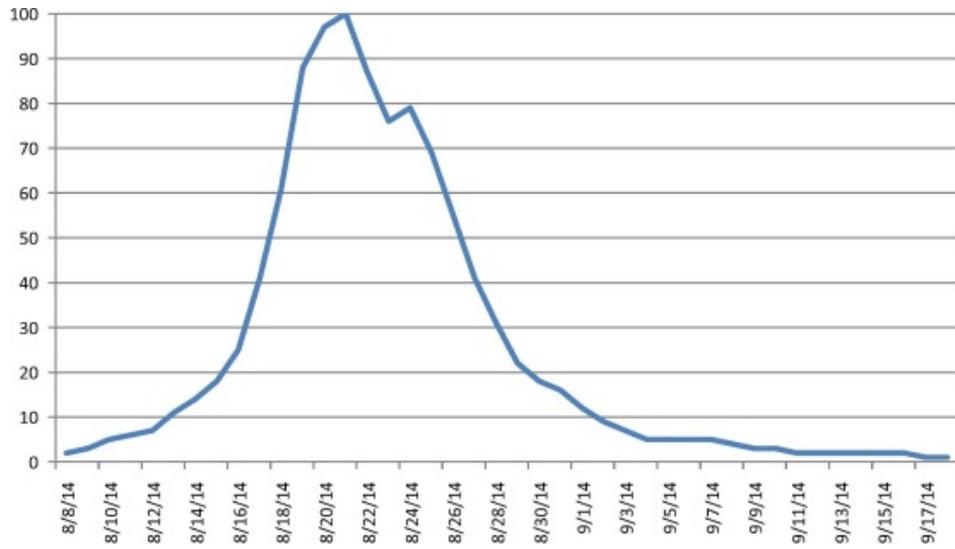


Table 5: “Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis” Search trending - Source: cited from Michael et al. (2018)

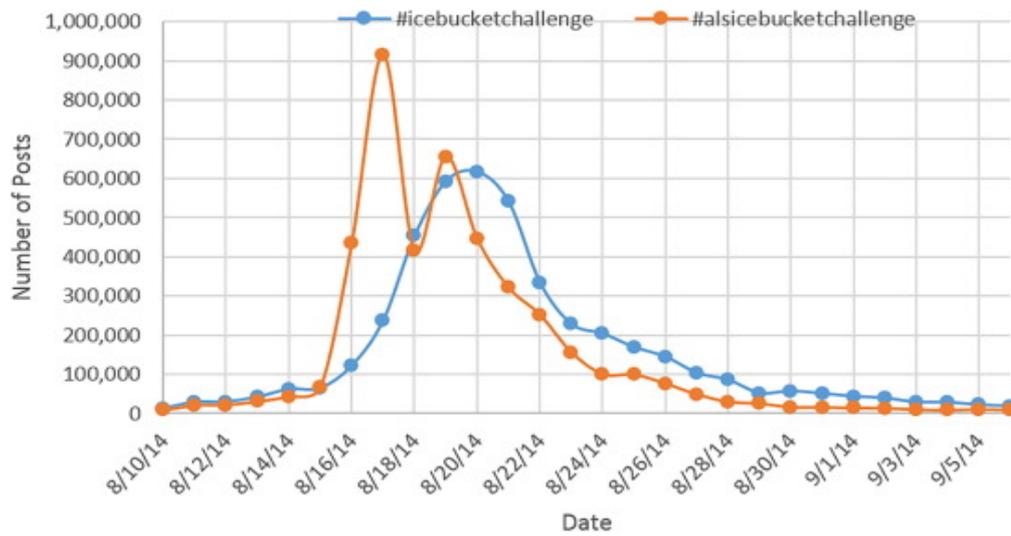


Table 6: Number of hashtags related to Ice Bucket Challenge on Twitter - Source: cited from Michael et al. (2018)

One of the factors that has contributed to the high rate of spread of Ice Bucket Challenge is the right timing. The Challenge started at the beginning of summer, the hottest time in the United States. The act of pouring an ice bucket of water over one's head can be perceived as a fun and enticing activity for people in the summer, encouraging them to participate, even if some of them don't know or have no intention of donating. Reaching the "right people" who are opinion leaders on social media is another advantage to spreading the campaign, as they have tremendous "strong ties" and "weak ties" connections on social media.

First of all, the game itself is entertaining, amusing, fun and yet simple enough to stimulate and inspire people to participate in the activity without having to mention the behind meaning of the challenge. As previous studies have proven, positive emotions promote virality. Second, the campaign provides an opportunity to actively help an at-risk community, which can give people a sense of satisfaction and happiness. Third, the content of the Challenge itself does not emotionally appeal to the customer, but there are touching stories behind the disease that are directly related to the Challenge. The Challenge was initiated to bring joy to a family member of ALS. ALS was previously considered an incurable disease. Sufferers gradually lose control of their bodies and become immobile. ALS has no effect on the mental abilities of the sufferers, rather they are prisoners in their own

bodies. The creator and co-creator of the campaign also suffers from this symptom. The famous physicist Stephen Hawking also suffered from ALS and became paralyzed as a result. Such stories arouse the compassion of online users and motivate them to join the cause, to contribute something to this community, in other words, to share this campaign willingly. The content structure is simple and straightforward: Anyone taking the ice bucket shower can nominate three friends with the hashtag #icebucketchallenge. They have 24 hours to accept the Ice Bucket Challenge, record a video of themselves playing the game, upload the video and challenge the next one on social platforms, or donate money to the charity ALS instead.

Compared to a commercial product, a social cause seems to have more community appeal, offering high chances for community outreach. In the case of the Ice Bucket Challenge campaign, the product feature could be the reason why enormous opinion leaders voluntarily participate in the challenge, which contributes to the success of this campaign. The campaign did not abuse any sensitive issues for publicity. The criticism of water waste does not have a major negative impact on the virality and performance of the campaign overall.

Success critical factors	Aspects	Case analysis questions
Audience Target	Audience size	Mass audience, general public
	Audience characteristic	Male/ female, USA. Love fun activities.
Diffusion characteristic	Exponential	The campaign attracts 2.8 millions people & 20+ opinion leaders in USA joining the challenge within a month.
	Speed	
Message content	Content	A fun challenge with easy rule to follow
	Structure	Simple and straightforward
Product characteristic	Suitability	Social cause
Transmission channel	Platforms used	Mainly social platforms: Twitter, Facebook, Youtube & opinion leaders
	Sources credibility	Yes. The information source mainly comes from opinion leaders and participants' networks.
Overall campaign structure	Ethical, legal and culture	No significant findings about this issue

Table 7: Ice Bucket Challenge case summary

4.3. Case 3: Generali Vietnam- Live The Life You Desire

Case background

Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase customer awareness to the brand (brand awareness) • Increase customer affection for the brand (brand love) • Build a user-centred campaign that conveys "live the life you desire" messages, establish emotional rapport and encourage them to live fearlessly regardless of social norms and biases.
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produced a series of small videos which was uploaded in Generali Vietnam Youtube channel • Launched video regionally through YouTube brand channels, Facebook fan page with the support of 6s bumper ads , Facebook video ads, influencers, Zing mp3 masthead
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youtube KPI: total view: 30.5 millions with 55% view rate • Lead generation: 230% increase • Social media indicator: total impression 259K (140% KPI), total reach: 29K (181% KPI) & total engagement: 4K (170% KPI) • Latest post on Facebook produced 10K likes and 900 positive comments.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The impressive related social buzz gained proves the recognition of the audience for the viral video: “meaningful, touching yet entertaining to watch”, even a “unique hit among traditional Tet adverts”.• The number of online sales on February and June for “Sống Như Ý” product rose 178% after the viral campaign run.• Received “Marketing Campaign of the Year” award from InsuranceAsia News
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Generali was a latecomer compared to other international insurance rivals when it entered the Vietnamese market in 2011. Until 2018, its presence and brand awareness are still insignificant. The company's goal was to increase brand awareness and brand love in Vietnam, and slowly increase market share to 150% in 2020. For this reason, Generali decided to hire Mango Digital - one of the young local agencies - to develop a long-term marketing strategy, which in the end proved to be very successful, trying to revitalize the image in the eyes of the Vietnamese audience and bring a different vibe to the community. The "Sống Như Ý" or "Live the life you desire" campaign is a long-term campaign in which the viral video "Live the life you desire" is just the prelude to Generali's subsequent campaigns.

The commercial went viral immediately after its first airing, triggering humor but also joyful and touching emotions, but most importantly, it evokes empathy and a sense of relevance in the audience. The video begins with the background of preparation for the Vietnamese New Year. A young middle-class man returns home after exhausting and tiring days in the hectic city and is faced with the pressure of answering the scrutiny, privacy questions about jobs, marriage status, salary and what gifts do you bring back home from his parents, relatives, and unpleasant neighbors on New Year's Day. These questions are not just the obsessions of young people, they are a symbol of prejudice about the "successful, happy life" of society for young people, as well as the wishes and concerns of parents for their children.

Case Analysis

Based on the model proposed in Chapter 3 to analyze Generali's campaign, it is clear that Generali's target audience is very popular and large enough to spread the message. Generali focused on the urban upper class age group of 25 - 46 years old, which is the most potential group and accounts for almost 40% of Vietnam's population according to The World Factbook (2020). In addition, this age group is the largest and most active community on social media platforms in Vietnam (We Are Social, 2020, p.40).

Viral video content plays an essential role in creating viral effects for the campaign. First, Generali applied music marketing - one of the most trendy and widely used concepts in Vietnam in the last 5 years. The message "Live the life you desire, experience Tet the way you want" is the whole spirit of the video content. The content has two layers of meaning. The first layer is to spread the cheerful, optimistic lifestyle of "La Dolce Vita" of Italians - the home country of Generali Life Insurance, the second layer of the message is to encourage people to boldly live the life they want, because you only live once, you don't have an obligation to live for someone else's standards. Also, the video motivates people support and respect the loved ones' desire and passion. The content structure was established based on the most common narrative - the three-act structure but delivered in the creative form of a Broadway show which is coherent and easy for people to follow. In three scenes, the characters sing different genres of music with its own metaphor: the setup scene started with Turkish March music background - a classical piece represents the social prejudices that sung by the parents, neighbors and relatives. The confrontation part is produced with rap music, emphasizing the voice of the young generation about their desires and the folk music song Bella Ciao began when the old and young generations start to understand each other and celebrate happiness in harmony. This famous song also makes customers associated to Italy - the original country of this brand. The Venetian winged lion symbol was hidden in some frames of the videos, which shows the message: You can live the life you

want, Generali always stand by you. However, the message is implicit and difficult to for viewers associate with the brand, especially for those who do not know Generali and their products.

Considering the transmission method factor, Generali first released the viral video on the platform Youtube - the most used video platform in Vietnam (We Are Social, 2020), then uses their official social networks to re-share the video and uploads another version to the Facebook fan page. Social networks: Youtube, Facebook, Zing and Zalo are the main channels Generali used to launch the campaign, generate consumer attention and engagement. It is worth noting that Generali also used opinion leaders on social media to spread the messages in order to reach a wider audience. Trần Thành, Chung Chí Công Quang Đại and Hana Lexis are This approach has helped to increase reach and sharing to relevant target audiences. In addition, they used social seeding in various interest groups to spark discussion around the topic “Sống Như Ý” and pass on the viral video. Generali then expanded to other video platforms such as Zing video and Zing mp3 with a roadblock strategy to ensure that the film appears in many music charts and entertainment recommendations. All information were created and controlled under their official pages and credible sources online. In this way, the campaign also ensured the next success factor - diffusion characteristics when they were able to deliver a creative content to a right audience in a good timing of new year. In just one month, Generali

generated more than 30.5 million views on YouTube with a view-through rate of 55% - 22% higher than the market standard, 11,000 likes, attracted nearly 1,000 positive comments on YouTube and generated more than 14,000 likes when posted on Facebook (Mango Digital, 2020). The campaign began on January 1, 2020, at which time Generali was ranked 7th in the insurance industry brand rankings, but after only 1 month Generali had risen to 2nd in the rankings (Social Heat, 2020). The viral video "Live the life you desire" also is the only representative of Vietnam to enter the YouTube APAC leaderboard for "Top YouTube Ads People Watched in Asia-Pacific" in January 2020 (Generali Vietnam, 2020). The campaign also earned Generali Vietnam the gold prize in the Brand Awareness category at the MMA Smarties Awards 2020.

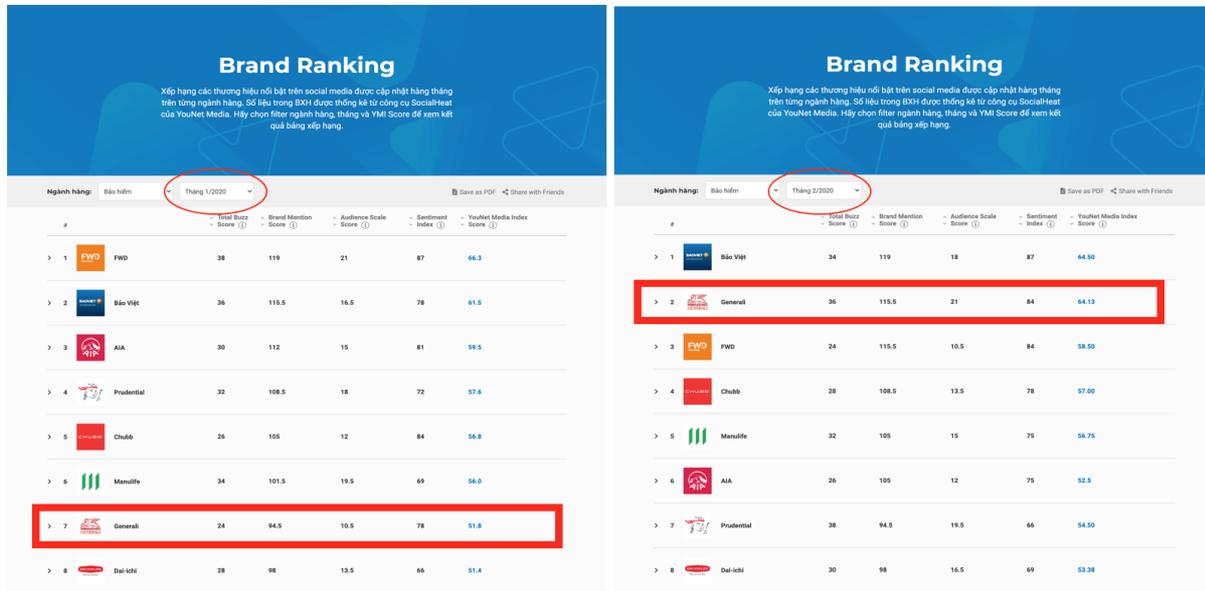


Table 8: Vietnam Insurance Brand Ranking in January and February, 2020 – Source: SocialHeats

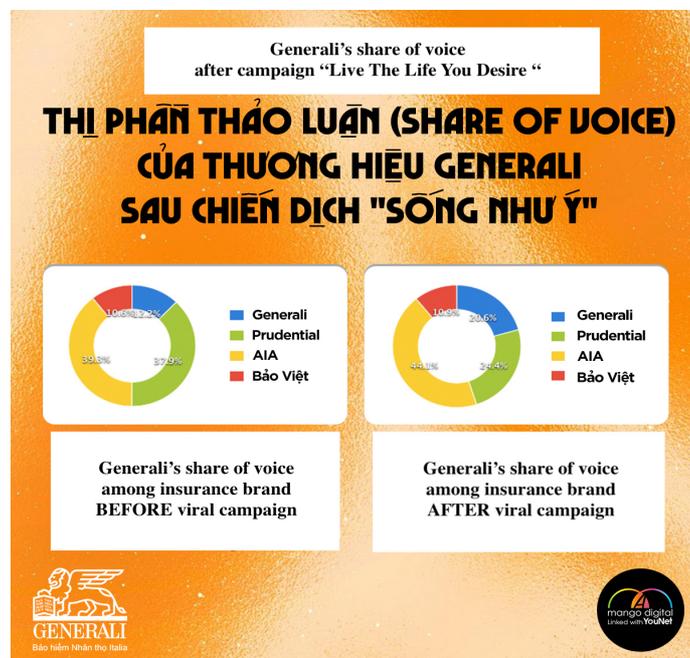


Table 9: Generali's Share of Voice after the campaign – Source: Mango Digital

In terms of product characteristics, insurance is an intangible product and can be categorized under experience goods. This type of product requires effort to search for information before making purchase decisions. Using viral marketing to boost insurance sales can be demanding for this type of product, but the goal of Generali's viral campaign is to increase brand love and awareness, so it works well in this case.

Overall, the campaign does not violate ethical or legal issues in the Vietnamese market. In fact, it used cultural and social norm factors to construct its message, but with the understanding of the local market, the message reached the consumer's heart, rather than distorting market culture. With the success of the *Sống Như Ý Tet* campaign, Generali decided to use the momentum of occasion-based marketing which is golden Tet moments, as one of its key branding activities throughout the year.

Success critical factors	Aspects	Case analysis questions
Audience Target	Audience size	Audience size is big enough: 25 – 45 years old, 40% users online of Vietnam market

	Audience characteristic	Both male/ female. Urban population with average income.
Diffusion characteristic	Exponential	30.5 millions views after 1 month & more than 10k + positive comments on Facebook page
	Speed	
Message content	Content	Use Broadway music theme concept Trigger joy, happiness, enthusiasm
	Structure	The three-act structure
Product characteristic	Suitability	Intangible & search goods
Transmission channel	Platforms used	Music channel: Zing mp3, Zing platform Social platforms: YouTube, Facebook & opinion leaders
	Sources credibility	Yes. The information source mainly comes from opinion leaders and official social channels.
Overall campaign structure	Ethical, legal and culture	No findings about campaign problems with ethical, legal and culture issues.

Table 10: Generali case summary

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The aim of this section is to discuss the main findings and their implications management as well as the limits of our research. The author recall that the objective of this research is to determine the factors of a success viral marketing campaign.

5.1. Discussion

Viral marketing is a strategic instrument that allows companies reduce advertising costs to reach a broader audience, strengthen customer relations and encourage brand involvement. However, this communication technique must be used with caution to avoid certain risks for the company including brand fatigue, the distortion of the message or even the risk of excessive success...etc. Having analyzed three cases, the author found that a successful viral campaign depends crucially on several factors:

Audience Target

The results show that the size of the target audience does have an impact on the success of a viral marketing campaign. In general, a sufficient target audience can help the campaign spread faster and sustain the viral effect last longer. However, the results do not mean that a small target audience (or a niche market) cannot produce good viral campaigns, but that the viral effect may not meet the company's expectations because it is difficult to reach the sufficient amount of audience to

produce a viral effect in a short time. Besides the audience size, other audience characteristics such as age, gender, geographic, and more complex criteria like their behavior and interest should be taken into consideration. Based on the clear picture of your message's recipients, marketing efforts can be tailored to create a content that can draw audiences' attention and reach those that most likely to offer the return on investment. Target audience is the premise to plan other aspects. If the businesses understand their audiences well, marketers can apply suitable content, right emotion and channel strategy to launch the campaign.

Message content

The findings suggest the success of a viral dynamic largely lies in the ability to create amusing, entertaining and informative content that attracts attention and evokes emotion. All three cases offer creative content, it can be simple or complex content, but all have an excellent mix of emotion, information and fine structure. They don't merely want to sell a product, but they tell a valuable story that can touch consumers' hearts. These campaign's contents concentrate on something other than the their own product. Generali encourages its customers to live the life they want, Dove motivates women to embrace their own beauty, while the ALS association uses an enjoyable challenge to educate the community about the disease and call for donations. Advertising becomes interesting when companies offer valuable and relevant content to their customers, highlighting positive emotions like

entertainment, excitement, surprise or fun to arouse customers' feelings. The more engaged the customer feels, the more likely the message will distribute throughout their network. Any creative and friendly communication that stands out from purely promotional sales campaigns will be gratefully received by recipients and preferably shared and disseminated with other contacts.

Transmission channel

Another essential feature of a successful campaign is the channel to disseminate the message. Choosing the appropriate distribution solution is important, as there are countless transmission methods for viral marketing. The content can be spread through social networks, sharing sites, blogs, referral websites, email marketing, discussion forums or opinion leaders, etc. The three cases wisely choose to focus on some efficient methods to initiate the campaign, rather than spreading it across all channels. Among other aspects of success, distribution channels also play a crucial role in defining the diffusion of viral campaigns, which the author will discuss later.

Among the methods mentioned above, social networks and opinion leaders are the most ideal channels for viral marketing as a dissemination channel. In social networks, thousands of people can be reached in a short time, which can also use interactive functions such as "like," "comment" or "share" photos and videos. It also

makes sense to target the opinion leaders or key influencers of a subject at the beginning of the viral launch. Messages from these individuals are well-received by the target group because there is more trust, authenticity and authority from the outset, so if the message is spread by the influencer, it has a very high priority to spread. In addition, opinion leaders have significant influence, which means they can appeal to a large number of prospects, making them a cost-effective source of information. The Ice Bucket Challenge proved that opinion leaders can be a powerful and enticing channel to spread the message on social networking sites. However, further research is needed on how to implement this tactic tactfully so that the marketing intent for commercial products is not too obvious. The author also believes that distribution must be as simple as possible, for example through recommendation features on social networks or simple embedding options for videos / graphics. The distribution channel should also be strategic and target group-oriented, the messages should appear on the relevant platforms where the target group is.

Diffusion characteristic

The research focuses mainly on two characteristics of diffusion, namely the speed and exponential effect of diffusion, which is possibly observed during the campaign. Obviously, these cases have demonstrated the ability to reach an exponential number of users and spread very quickly in the social environment, proving the diffusion is the

indispensable factor for the overall campaign's success. It took Dove only 10 days to get 30 million views and 660,000 shares from their viewers, Generali needed one month to have 30 million views on YouTube and climb from 7th to 2nd place on the Insurance Brand Ranking, while Ice Bucket Challenge got more than 28 million people to participate in their challenge and 2.8 million challenge videos were uploaded and shared only on the Facebook platform within one month. According to Roger (2003), in order to achieve these rapid and exponential rates, good content delivered to social systems through the right distribution channel at the right time contributes to its successful dissemination. As the author discussed above about the other factors, it is clear that there is a mutual correlation between the elements: audience target, content messages, distribution channel with diffusion characteristic, if one of the three elements is missing, the diffusion effect may not be produced.

Product characteristic

In this research, product attributes have been shown to have no significant impact on the overall success of the campaign. However, three representative cases do not provide significant data to evaluate the effect of this feature. In fact, product trait seems to influence the level of attitude and behavior towards the viral campaign. In the case of Ice Bucket Challenge, it is a non-commercial product for a social purpose that seems to attract sharing from opinion leaders and the community more than commercial products. Also, Dove is already famous cosmetic brand, thus the motive of consumers to share their experiences and opinions about the brand may

consider higher. As the customers have a strong attitude (satisfy or dissatisfy) toward the product tend to trigger word-of-mouth rather than the person has neutral judgement. However, in the case of Generali Insurance, the product itself is difficult to execute a viral campaign and its brand name is limit in the market. The author believes that the product characteristic needs further investigation. Future research can be conducted by analyzing more cases with different types of products or by conducting a quantitative method to understand customers' perspective.

Generally speaking, whether it's a tangible or intangible product, search goods or an experience goods, there's still a chance to launch an effective campaign that can spread throughout the community.

Overall campaign structure

Generally, three cases don't have any significant problems with legal issues or ethical standards. This factor seems negligible, but once it happens, it has a negative consequence for businesses' reputation. Unfortunately, the author doesn't pick any cases which generate adverse effects when violating this factor. Thus, further researches on this issue can conduct in the future to investigate its outcome on brand image and company reputation. In the end, the business needs to aware of the campaign structure in overall to ensure it meets the standard of ethical, legal and culture environment of the targeted market so that the message doesn't receive negative response when it has gone viral.

5.2. Conclusion

Viral marketing has been extensively developed in recent years, especially among larger companies. However, due to the rapidly increasing number of viral campaigns, it is becoming increasingly difficult for newcomers to work with it. Although there are already countless successful examples, investing in a viral campaign remains a challenge for many businesses. Knowing the complexity and requirements of applying this strategy, many companies are searching for the appropriate know-how to get the desired attention.

The aim of this thesis was to find out which success factors are decisive for a viral effect in marketing campaigns and help companies to implement their viral strategy more efficiently. In previous literature, various success factors have been discussed and already analyzed. Using recent case studies from this decade, these aspects have been validated and thus provide companies with a basic guide for campaign planning and implementation. Formulating an outstanding viral marketing strategy requires proper planning considering all the attributes of success.

Once the viral strategy is applied, the target audience is the first attribute that businesses need to consider carefully. Having a proper audience size and understanding their characteristics such as customer behavior and interest will support viral content creation, identifying the appropriate distribution channel, and spreading the effect for a longer period of time.

Other important success factors relate to the content of the message. Whether the campaign triggers sharing or not depends heavily on the content people see online. While a company can orient itself to the other success factors, it requires an extremely creative idea from the advertiser to stand out from the crowd. Next, it's a matter of choosing the right channels to facilitate transmission that match customer characteristics. Opinion leaders and social networks are multipliers that should be considered because of their effectiveness. If the company successfully executes the three factors mentioned above, the diffusion characteristics of the viral campaign will be ensured, thus guaranteeing success in the first phase.

Finally, other factors relating to legal, ethical and cultural issues should be considered in advance as these considerations may affect the entire campaign. This requires advance planning to isolate any negative effects. Controlling a viral campaign is difficult because the consumer is given a lot of freedom in communication; once the campaign violates this factor, the result will be difficult to control.

Finally, other factors relating to legal, ethical and cultural issues should be considered in advance as these considerations may affect the whole campaign. This requires advance planning to isolate negative effects. Controlling a viral campaign is difficult as a lot of communication freedom is given to the consumer, so once the campaign violates this factor, the outcome will be difficult to manage.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Viral marketing mechanism - Source: BrandVietnam	14
Table 2: Critical factors for success viral marketing campaigns literature review summary	28
Table 3: Conceptual framework on key factors of a successful viral campaign ...	41
Table 4: Dove case summary.....	50
Table 5: “Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis” Search trending - Source: cited from Michael et al. (2018).....	53
Table 6: Number of hashtags related to Ice Bucket Challenge on Twitter - Source: cited from Michael et al. (2018)	53
Table 7: Ice Bucket Challenge case summary	56
Table 8: Vietnam Insurance Brand Ranking in January and February, 2020 – Source: SocialHeats	63
Table 9: Generali’s Share of Voice after the campaign – Source: Mango Digital	63
Table 10: Generali case summary.....	65