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# The Rise of Viral Marketing through the New Media of Social Media

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The Rise of Viral Marketing through the New Media of Social Media:

An Analysis and Implications for Consumer Behavior

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## Executive Summary

In regards to company perception, brand awareness and communication, the balance of power has shifted from the company to the consumer through the rebirth of word of mouth marketing (Datta, Chowdhury and Chakraborty, 2005) through new media formats (Ferguson, 2008). Understanding the relationship between word of mouth marketing and viral marketing provides the framework for understanding of why viral marketing through social media formats has been effective.

An analysis of viral marketing presents the framework for positive perceptions of this developing trend. Viral marketing utilizes multiple social media formats, including but not limited to blogs, social networking sites, YouTube, and email communication formats. The majority of companies in the Inc. 500 have begun to embrace social media formats for implementation into their overarching integrated marketing and communications strategies. With this foundation, it is asserted that most growing companies within the United States are also taking advantage of the viral marketing benefits. Several brief case studies are presented as support that companies across all sectors are implementing viral components into their overall marketing strategy and campaigns. Companies such as Gillette, Xerox, Careerbuilder.com, The Dark Knight and T-Mobile are analyzed.

With supporting data and with case studies reviewed, recommendations for entry into an online social media presence are presented. Tips are provided from successful first mover companies to both aid in successful strategic program development and implementation and in winning executive management support. Examples for social

media policies are provided and suggestions for formulas to measure social media ROI are explained.

This paper fully addresses the rationale of the need for corporate presence in social media, the value that can be derived from a well-developed viral marketing campaign, strategies for entry into this developing new media segment, and an analysis of why entry into social media is crucial for corporate success and brand management. There are marked advantages to the embracing of new formats for consumer interaction: “brands increase consumer loyalty by involving their customers in their decision-making processes, and the research provides substantial profiling intelligence as a basis for sales and marketing decisions” (Online communities, 2009, p. 13). Social media is the newest and most actively engaging forum for customer and company interaction.

## The Rise of Viral Marketing and Social Media through New Media:

### An Analysis and Implications for Consumer Behavior

#### Introduction

In company perception, brand awareness and communication, the balance of power has shifted from the company to the consumer through the rebirth of word of mouth marketing (Datta, Chowdhury and Chakraborty, 2005) through new media formats (Ferguson, 2008). As a result of the empowered customer (Barnes, Cass, Getgood, Gillin, and Gossieaux, 2008), it has become imperative that companies who desire long term profitability, increased sales and customer loyalty embrace the new media technologies that are changing the way communication and information sharing occur (Clifford-Marsh, 2009). Additionally, the current consumer behavior research will require continual analysis in this area as technologies develop and transition into everyday use by the consumer.

This review of viral marketing and social media outlets through new media will provide an introduction to the new media of social media, an analysis of changing consumer behavior in relation to technology innovation, a review of viral marketing, and an online marketing trend study focused on current companies using new media technologies. Finally, recommended entry strategy for marketing practitioners into social media and viral marketing will be discussed, with conclusions provided in relation to both marketing and consumer behavior research and practice.

Significant research has been analyzed and will be provided as authoritative support throughout this analysis. Journal publications, case studies, research studies,

fact sheets and current literature encompassing the research of Barnes and Mattson (2008), Henry (2002), Datta, et al., (2005), Radder (2002), Bernoff and Li (2008), Vranica, (2006), Readon (2009), and Ferguson (2008), among others, is incorporated as authoritative support. Analysis of this research coupled with conclusions and recommendations will collectively assert the value of understanding social media and the corporate utilization of technologies available.

Research concludes that platforms utilizing social media are revolutionizing communication channels for corporations and consumers alike (Ferguson, 2008; Datta, et al., 2005; Henry, 2002; Barnes, et al., 2008). Ochman (2009) confirms “for companies, resistance to social media is futile. Millions of people are creating content for the social Web” (p. 1). The balance of communication power has truly shifted.

Empowered by online social technologies such as blogs, social networking sites like MySpace, user-generated content sites like You Tube and countless communities across the Web, customers are now connecting with and drawing power from one another. They’re defining their own perspective on companies and brands, a view that’s often at odds with the image a company wants to project. This groundswell of people using technologies to get the things they need from one another, rather than from companies, is now tilting the balance of power from company to customer (Bernoff and Li, 2008, p. 36).

New media is defined as “any interactive media, especially electronic mass media combined with computers; also, this combination as a profession” (dictionary.com, 2009). There are many aspects of new social media and equally as many avenues of approach to the effective utilization of new media for marketing and

communications purposes. Tedesco (2009) reports that “more and more business is going to transact via Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and other applications yet to be developed” cautioning that this movement is too important to not be included in a corporate marketing and communications strategy (p. 1). This research is centered on an analysis of what new media is, coupled with an in-depth study of current new media opportunities including viral marketing and the utilization of social media.

The question arises if the growth of social media communications is arising from technologic innovation, or, if technological innovation has arisen out of changing consumer needs and developments. Social media is essentially a new format of word-of-mouth marketing. The research of Ferguson (2008) indicates that through the “proliferation of broadband access and its attendant social networks, video-sharing sites and blogs, word-of-mouth now spreads at the speed of thought” (p. 180). The next section will attempt to discover whether the underlying motivator of social media rise and impact is the result of consumer behavior demands or the innovations of technology.

#### Changing consumer behavior: Analyzing innovation’s impact

The role and involvement of the customer in purchase decisions and in brand management has changed. No longer can a company passively assert its brand promise and marketing messages out onto the consumer (Bernoff and Li, 2008). The tide has changed through the development of new technologies, and the consumer’s role in perception shaping and purchase power has evolved as a result (Ferguson, 2008). According to Ochinero, “research validates with certainty that social media is something businesses can no longer ignore. Not only do consumers’ opinions about

their care experience shared online influence other people's perceptions about a business, they truly impact purchase intent" (Barnes, et al., 2008, p. 7). The research study conducted and supported by the Society for New Communications Research provides quantitative data to support the assumptions of changing consumer behavior.

The consumer now demands a higher, more personal interaction with the company, such that leads to the development of an experience (Radder, 2002). "The new demands created by changed consumer needs, societal changes and technological developments, mean that organizations would have to keep up with these changes and start to rethink their ways of operation" (Radder, 2002, p. 49). The consumer's demands for a personal, interactive and relational experience have arisen from the opportunity to demand and experience this type of interaction made possible through improved technology.

Companies are paying attention to the changing needs of the consumer (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, and Best, 2007). Firms now "want consumers to use their [web] sites not only when explicitly seeking product specific information but on a regular basis for a variety of purposes. This is one way a firm can build a relationship with the consumer" (Hawkins, et al., 2007, p. 532). The research of Radder (2002) postulates companies must now view the consumer as a collaborator in the marketing and communication process, and must embrace the individual needs and expectations of consumers who desire a more personal experience. This is supported by the research of Popcorn (2005), who confirms that current trends have "led consumers to reject artificial, highly scripted, top-down marketing" and are instead seeking a personal, conversational experience (p. 36). Additionally, the research of Hawkins, et al., 2007,

asserts that viral marketing is utilized by corporations to create buzz, which is defined as the “exponential expansion of word of mouth” (p. 248).

Research supports the assumption that more and more consumers are finding their information online. The research findings of Barnes, et al., (2008), surveyed 320 respondents, and concluded that more than 70% of respondents engage in pre-purchase online search and behavior at least sometimes. Table 1 of the appendix further defines the use of technology by the consumer, with research asserting that purchase decisions are most strongly influenced by search engine results, online rating systems, discussion forums, and blogs (Barnes , et al., 2008). While not yet as strongly influential, social networking sites, YouTube, and micro-blogging sites are showing up in research and survey results as an actual source of information attainment (Barnes, et al., 2008). A full 95% of respondents agreed that their decision to select a brand has been based on their own customer care experience (Barnes, et al., 2008). However, it is interesting to note that a similarly high number of consumers surveyed indicated that their selection of a brand is based on the experiences of others as attained from online information gathering and knowledge sharing (Barnes, et al., 2008).

Table 2 in the appendix graphs this response of engaged online consumers, with 74% of respondents agreeing to the influence of other’s experiences on their own individual purchase experiences. This is significant data for the marketing practitioner to consider, given that the information is now obtained by the consumer from other consumers as opposed to directly from the company itself. Even more telling are the results of the question asked of the survey group regarding the use of blogs and other formats is essential. A majority, 81%, of respondents agreed that sharing of experiences

through social media formats has the potential to foster change in the interaction of the company with consumers in the marketplace (Barnes, et al., 2008).

Companies are responding to the changing trends of consumer information obtainment and desire for relational and personal experiences through social media technologies. One such technology that companies are now employing to truly engage the consumer in the purchase experience and brand promotion is viral marketing. Viral marketing provides the means to utilize developed social networks and the value and trust of word-of-mouth advertising to promote brand awareness and build a customer base. An analysis and understanding of viral marketing is essential to building a successful integrated marketing and communications strategy while collectively creating promotional campaigns that will have staying power and results.

Viral marketing analysis and the role of the online social network

Viral marketing is defined by Datta, et al., (2005), as “marketing techniques that seek to exploit pre-existing social networks to produce exponential increases in brand awareness, through processes similar to the spread of an epidemic” (p. 72). In essence, viral marketing can loosely be translated as “network-enhanced word-of-mouth” (Datta, et al., 2005, p. 72). Viral marketing occurs through many online mediums, including “posted reviews, web-based opinion platforms, boycott web sites, news groups, mail bags, discussion forums, personal e-mails, chat rooms” and other formats including blogs and social networking sites (Datta, et al., 2005, p. 73). Viral marketing truly is the rebirth of word of mouth advertising, buzz generation and communication strategies. “Viral marketing works because friends are better at target marketing than any database” (Bulkeley, 2002, p. 25).

Traditionally, word of mouth marketing has been proven to be most effective and obtaining a customer base and bolstering sales (Datta, et al., 2005). However, “viral marketing has become the defining marketing trend of the decade” (Ferguson, 2008, p. 179). Viral marketing is so termed because it takes on the behavior of spreading of a virus at an exponential fashion and portrays this spread as a positive sharing of information to others within a network. “The key difference between a viral and a TV ad is that a viral is something you will seek out, take pleasure in finding, and send on for someone else to enjoy” (Clifford-Marsh, 2009, p. 51). Viral marketing takes the traditional roots of word of mouth marketing and exponentially expanded the reach through social networks, blogs, and other technological mediums (Datta, et al., 2005). Word of mouth (WOM) marketing is such a successful marketing strategy because it breeds “familiarity, personal connection, care and trust” between the consumer and the translator of the information (Datta, et al., 2005, p. 70). Viral marketing emulates the basic premise of traditional WOM marketing, only on a significantly larger scale. Companies have been trying for years to get a handle on WOM advertising to make it work to the advantage of the company. The rise of the internet and subsequent technologies and online platforms has resulted in a truly attainable way for corporations to positively benefit from online WOM advertising strategies.

Companies must now employ a new focus strategy to continue to engage consumers (Henry, 2002). Henry (2002) recommends employing a “holistic marketing framework” in order to move from a company-driven to a customer-driven strategy that resonates with the consumer and allows for “the capacity to offer customized products, services, programs, and messages” (p. 34). Viral marketing provides one of those

mediums to achieve this new objective. Through blogs and other viral formats “customized online communities of opinion leaders enable brands to build deep relationships with their target audience, thereby providing a unique opportunity to increase brand engagement” (Online communities, 2009, p. 13).

The practical review of viral marketing is essential to understanding the value that it can provide for a company. Next, online marketing trends utilizing viral marketing means will be addressed. This section will analyze supporting research on the trend growth toward utilization and familiarity in social media.

Online marketing trends utilizing viral marketing means

One of the most well known and well-researched viral marketing strategies was the Subservient Chicken viral video (Clifford-Marsh, 2009) by Burger King in 2004 received over 20 million hits and revolutionized the way the marketing industry viewed all forms of viral marketing, including the viral video (Have you got the bug, 2008).

Hundreds of companies, large and small, are coming up with ingenious ways to promote themselves, by posting videos on YouTube, inventing adver-games, and even employing “connector agents” who spread the buzz about a new product or sale through their own social networks. A study by *Inc. Magazine* recently reported that 82 percent of fastest growing private companies are using these kinds of initiatives (Have you got the bug, 2008, p. 17).

In awareness of the rise in the utilization of viral marketing, Barnes and Mattson (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of the Inc. 500. This analysis driven research study was geared toward understanding the depth of social media and viral marketing utilization within the companies of the Inc. 500. The study analyses data from 2007 and 2008 to

show the significant growth in and awareness of social media and viral marketing technologies. Study results are conclusive that the rise of social media usage is here to stay in successful company profiles, and additionally provide support for the value of a company's involvement in social media and correlation to corporate success.

Research from 2007 showed that the Inc. 500 had 19% of participating companies participating in blogging, with the 2008 data reporting that 39% of the Inc. 500 companies are now blogging (Barnes and Mattson, 2008). It is also interesting to note that those companies in the Inc. 500 are the fastest growing private United States Companies, indicating that the rise in social media usage has a direct correlation to an increase in sales and corporate growth (Barnes and Mattson, 2008). Social media familiarity also has increased as shown by research which asserts that in 2007, 42% of respondents claimed familiarity of social media, with 57% claiming familiarity in 2008 (Barnes and Mattson, 2008). Table 3 in the appendix shows the types of social media that Inc. 500 companies are employing in 2007 and again in 2008 with the percent of respondents utilizing the technology also indicated. Every area on the graph except one has grown, ranging from message boards, social networking, online video, blogging to podcasting. The only graph point to decline was the indicator of the companies who do not use any social media (Barnes and Mattson, 2008). Of most significant interest in Table 3 are the increase in social networking utilization (from 27% to 49%) and online video (from 24% to 45%) by the Inc. 500 respondents (Barnes and Mattson, 2008).

Table 4 in the appendix represents the increase in view of importance of social media technologies. This is a significant increase from 2007 to 2008 with an increase of the viewpoint of very important to business/marketing strategy from 26% to 44%

(Barnes and Mattson, 2008). The significant rise in perceived importance and the significant rise in the use of social media in the Inc. 500 indicate that social media drives business results. Barnes and Mattson (2008) concur, asserting “for the first time, growth in familiarity, adoption and importance to mission has been documented in a statistically significant, longitudinal study. If the Inc. 500 is embracing social media at this record pace”, is it safe to assert that the rest of corporations within the United States are also exploring and employing such strategies? (p. 5).

There are many examples of companies throughout all business sectors who have successfully employed viral marketing strategies to yield unanticipated brand awareness results. The next section of research will discuss briefly the case analyses of five such companies to provide examples of how one can employ a successful viral marketing campaign. These results utilize the “top criteria for evaluating a person’s influence in online communities and social networks [which] are participation level, frequency of activity and prominence in the market or community” (Carrabis, Cass, Gillin, Nacht, and Peverill-Conti, 2008, p. 16).

#### Case studies of successful viral marketing campaigns

There are multiple researched examples of corporations that have embraced very successfully viral marketing strategies and reaped increased positive brand awareness and thereby increased sales. Readon (2009) asserts that “viral marketing has moved on from being about posting videos on YouTube. These days it can also be a long-term strategic business tool to build brands” (p. 44). Those companies who are most benefitting from viral marketing campaigns have found ways to tie the campaigns to other more traditional forms of media. For those engaged companies, social media is

moving into a core competency capacity for sharing information (Carrabis, et al., 2008). For example, the viral marketing campaign unveiled prior to the release of *The Dark Knight* incorporated billboards, commercials, social networks, fake websites, email blasts, online puzzles and activities all leading up to the film's premier (Readon, 2009). The campaign was a huge financial success. The movie grossed over \$1 billion worldwide (Readon, 2009).

Another example of a successful viral marketing campaign was the "Let's Say Thanks" campaign by Xerox (How to launch, 2008). The campaign results were more than 1.5 million messages sent from their company web site in the first month alone. The viral marketing campaign developed by Xerox allowed consumers to create and send a heart-felt message to military personnel globally (How to launch, 2008). Additional coverage provided to the company at no-cost from this viral marketing campaign was achieved from the news media coverage by Fox News and CNN of the campaign and its positive impact on the military personnel (How to launch, 2008).

Gillette implemented a viral marketing campaign to boost sales of the company's new three-blade Venus razor. The company sent a truck around Florida during spring break, and combined the billboard style truck panel advertising with a sweepstakes and an opportunity to share information about the sweepstakes with friends through a digital greeting card. The digital greeting card included photos of the contestant at the beach (Bulkeley, 2002). The result of their digital campaign was that more than 20% of the sweepstakes entries came from the receivers of viral e-cards (Bulkeley, 2002). This shows the reach increase potential that viral marketing activities can bring to a promotion.

Careerbuilder.com implemented a viral marketing campaign that included a strategy focused around an upcoming Super Bowl commercial (Vranica, 2006). Two weeks prior to the Super Bowl, Careerbuilder.com rolled out a website that allowed consumers to create a short video clip featuring a chimp and had the opportunity to include a message from the consumer. The result of the viral video message was an increase in brand awareness. More than 44 million viral emails were sent and more than 6.5 million unique visitors were tracked at the company's website (Vranica, 2006). The success of the Careerbuilder.com campaign supports additional research findings that agree ads that engage consumers and get them personally involved in the advertising campaign have a greater level of engagement and stronger brand power (Vranica, 2006). Comparatively, Careerbuilder.com spent over \$5 million on the production and airtime for the two Super Bowl commercials, but spent only a few hundred thousand dollars on the viral email campaign (Vranica, 2006). This example asserts the true cost savings value of viral marketing over traditional marketing means.

T-Mobile unveiled a "Life's for Sharing" campaign, which included viral components. Initially the communications strategy of the "Life's for Sharing" campaign was to premier the video in a commercial, but those who happened to see the set, a flash mob at a British train station, filmed the event on their mobile phones and posted it onto YouTube. T-Mobile responded to this movement by creating a T-Mobile branded YouTube page to post the video, where online the video clip has been viewed 3.5 million times (Clifford-Marsh, 2009). T-Mobile continued to build on the viral momentum and "created a viral game allowing users to upload photos, which are superimposed on people dancing in animal costumes" (Clifford-Marsh, 2009, p. 50). The entertainment

factor and game component allows consumers to interact with the brand, which engages the consumer and creates positive brand associations. The success of the “Life’s for Sharing” campaign lead to the increase of T-Mobile’s online advertising budget by 40% (Clifford-Marsh, 2009).

These examples provide the keys to viral marketing success. It is essential to ensure that there are other components that support the viral marketing campaign, and that there is an appeal to the consumer’s emotions. Finally, it is essential that the message be in a format that is easy to share and that the message arouse a response in the consumer strong enough to result in the forwarding, or sharing, of that message with their social network (How to launch, 2008). “Ultimately, for viral [marketing] to work, it all comes back to the power of people’s emotions and the ability to affect it so information can be shared with other s who are like-minded” (How to launch, 2008, p. 2). One must ensure that the company internally and externally is prepared prior to the implementation of social media into an overarching marketing and communications strategy in order to positively benefit from consumer interactions and obtain executive support.

Recommended entry strategy for marketing management into social media

Research concludes that it is a well educated, highly affluent, and younger individual that is typically utilizing online formats for information gathering and disseminating (Ferguson, 2008). Barnes, et al., (2008) asserts that companies must now respond to the demands and buyer behavior of this highly desirable consumer group.

There is a growing group of highly desirable consumers: 25-55 year olds, college-educated, earning \$100,000+ annually, a very powerful group in terms of buying behavior. These most savvy and sought after consumers are using social media to research companies. They will not support companies with poor customer care reputations, and finally, they will talk about all of this openly with others via multiple online vehicles. This research should serve as a wake-up call to companies: listen, respond and improve (Barnes, et al., 2008, p. 12).

Understanding the shift in consumer buyer behavior and decision-making informational gathering from traditional media to online sources is not enough (Ferguson, 2008). A company must respond with a new strategy for marketing and communications that integrates the use of social media for creating the customer experience and brand management. This truly involves a new way of perceiving the consumer: not simply as a commodity, but as something that requires relational and experiential involvement. Viral marketing must become a component of an overarching integrated marketing and communications strategy (How to launch, 2008). "If viral marketing is not the magic bullet, it has at least become a deadly arrow in the marketer's quiver" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 181).

Research previously noted confirmed that the Inc. 500 are significantly involved in the utilization of social media, how then would one begin the process of incorporating social media into their current integrated marketing and communications strategy and portfolio? The research of Bernoff and Li (2008) indicate that the utilization and, as they define it, groundswell from social media can span several departments within the organization. This is partly the reason why many traditional marketing managers and

executive teams are not initially supportive of deploying social applications as a part of the overarching marketing and communications strategy.

Bernoff and Li (2008) assert that the following components of the organization can and should be involved in the deploying and maintenance of social applications: research and development, marketing, sales, customer support, and operations. Table 5 in the appendix displays the type of groundswell objective, the appropriate social applications and the suggested metrics for each department to support implication of social media strategy within an organization (Bernoff and Li, 2008). The utilization of suggested metrics can help to build executive support and assist in the measurement of ROI to ensure a healthy and long-term foundation for one's social media initiatives. It is imperative that a social media plan be well executed, maintained, and supported.

The Society for New Communications Research has published *Best practices for developing and implementing a social media policy*. A companywide guideline is essential to ensure appropriate use of social media, to inform employees of the social media available to them, and to engage positive and brand-supported communications (Society for new communications, 2007). The research suggests that highest priorities for successful development and implementation entail addressing the company culture, building and maintaining trust, providing training, ensuring transparency, holding to high standards of accuracy, and developing and responding appropriately to comments (Society for new communications, 2007). One of the greatest challenges to marketers is the freedom and two-way communication that results from the application of social media. No longer is the entire brand message fully in the hands of the company. This can be a very large hurdle to overcome, therefore, it is recommended that the corporate

policy outline expectations regarding utilization by employees, foster mutual respect, and maintain transparency without breaking confidentiality (Society for new communications, 2007).

Due to the extent of corporations that are already utilizing social media for their overarching strategies, the adoption of social media into a marketing and communications portfolio is no longer a truly first-mover strategy. An additional talking-point for communication with executive management to build support for a social media component to a marketing portfolio is the cost savings. Blogs are essentially free of charge. Viral marketing creation and deployment costs are significantly below the costs of more traditional marketing techniques such as a commercial spot on prime time. Viral video is not a costly venture (How to launch, 2008). Readon (2009) confirms that the budgets of companies are much tighter in the current recession and therefore “viral marketing may receive more attention than ever before. But to do it well, businesses need to remember that the most effective campaigns are those treating it as a long-term, strategic tool, not a short-term gimmick” (p. 44).

Calculating the ROI, or return on investment, is not an easy process for marketing and sales strategies overall, and is equally as challenging when trying to measure the ROI for one’s social media efforts. The research of Tedesco (2009) has created a calculation that can be utilized to determine if the social media efforts are paying off. He recommends:

Choose a consistent time period for each calculation. Hours invested in social media activities x average hourly rate = social media cost. Social media cost divided by target contribution margin % = breakeven. Number of social media

leads x lead value = social generated revenue. Social media generated revenue divided by breakeven = social media payback indicator. If your social media payback indicator in step 4 is greater than 1.0, you are on track to experience a positive return on your investment (Tedesco, 2009, p. 1)

Implementing this calculation to assist in ROI determination of one's social media efforts is a good starting point. As awareness and understanding of the social media as related to one's specific needs is developed, the calculation can be fine tuned to fit specific needs. Carrabis, et al., (2008) assert that about half the survey respondents they paneled are implementing some form of measurement for their social media initiatives. Some measurement avenues by these marketing and communications professionals include the measurement of "enhanced relationships with key audiences, improve the reputation of the businesses, drive customer awareness of their online activities and to solicit customer comments and feedback" (Carrabis, et al., 2008, p. 16).

Another avenue being utilized through social media means is the utilization of panels. There are marked advantages to this approach: "brands increase consumer loyalty by involving their customers in their decision-making processes, and the research provides substantial profiling intelligence as a basis for sales and marketing decisions" (Online communities, 2009, p. 13). Therefore, it is recommended that panels be incorporated into social media marketing strategy to allow for the value-add of profiling intelligence on one's consumer base.

## Conclusion

The time has come for all companies who desire to influence company perception and sales strategies to employ social media techniques. This includes the

incorporation of viral marketing strategies as well as avenues for consumers to interact and develop a relationship with the company. Releasing control of the message development and translation into the hands of the consumers does entail some level of risk. However, embracing social media communications and marketing strategies is in line with the changing and developing consumer behavior expectations of the desired customer base. Consumers are and will continue to share their opinions on corporate brands and products with or without company interaction. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the company to be engaged in this communication sharing, positively influencing the message, and facilitating action and brand awareness through integrated viral marketing strategies.

Survey and research results all collectively assert that social media and internet technologies are here to stay. Embracing new media strategies is not only a cost savings measure in a time of economic recession but additionally provides an opportunity to increase brand awareness and exponentially employ the most influential marketing strategy of all: word-of-mouth marketing. Entry into online communications and marketing technologies has low barriers to entry and therefore any company can do it. The social media utilization today resembles the use of corporate websites in the early 1990's (Ferguson, 2008). It is something that every company knows they need to be incorporating but the methodology of implementation has not yet been fully determined.

This paper has provided research analysis and insight into the application of social media and viral marketing. Company case studies have been analyzed from Xerox, Careerbuilder.com, Gillette, T-Mobile and The Dark Knight. Each company that

was reviewed employed a slightly different viral marketing strategy. However, all companies employed an overarching strategy that included traditional components with their viral components. The Burger King Subservient Chicken viral video results as a sole-standing viral strategy are more the exception than the rule in marketing campaigns. For example, Xerox employed email, Gillette employed face-to-face communication and sweepstakes opportunities, and Careerbuilder.com utilized prime-time Super Bowl commercial spots.

The results of this study indicate that there is no one-size-fits all approach to viral marketing and social media strategies. The results of this study also indicate that while there is a significant increase in companies that are employing new media strategies, no all-encompassing measurement for the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns has yet been identified. This report provides examples of return on investment measurements that can be utilized in starting up a social media program; however, adjustment of these metrics to meet individual needs is acceptable. The successful measurement of ROI is nothing new for marketing practitioners, yet it is valued and normally required, especially when employing a new strategy.

This author recommends, as a result of significant research and analysis, that every marketing practitioner find a way to, at minimum, start small in the social media landscape. The conversations that consumers are already having are too vital to long-term corporate success to not be involved in influencing these discussions. The consumer behavior strategies in relationship to finding and sharing information have changed, and this transition is not a passing fad. The opportunity provided to consumers to seek out information and to actively engage in influencing the decisions of

others and seek to be influenced themselves is here to stay. This is due to the technological advances that have made this level of instant and far-reaching communication possible.

The yet fully unknown realm of social media arouses in many practitioners a mixture of excitement, fear, and fascination. They're alarmed at the prospect of ceding control of their messages to a community of unknowns. Yet at the same time they're excited about the prospect of leveraging these same tools to speak directly to their constituents without the involvement of media intermediaries (Carrabis, et al., 2008, p. 11).

Viral marketing is here to stay. The tools, technologies, and support are available to embrace and profit from the incorporation of viral marketing and social media into an integrated marketing and communications strategy.

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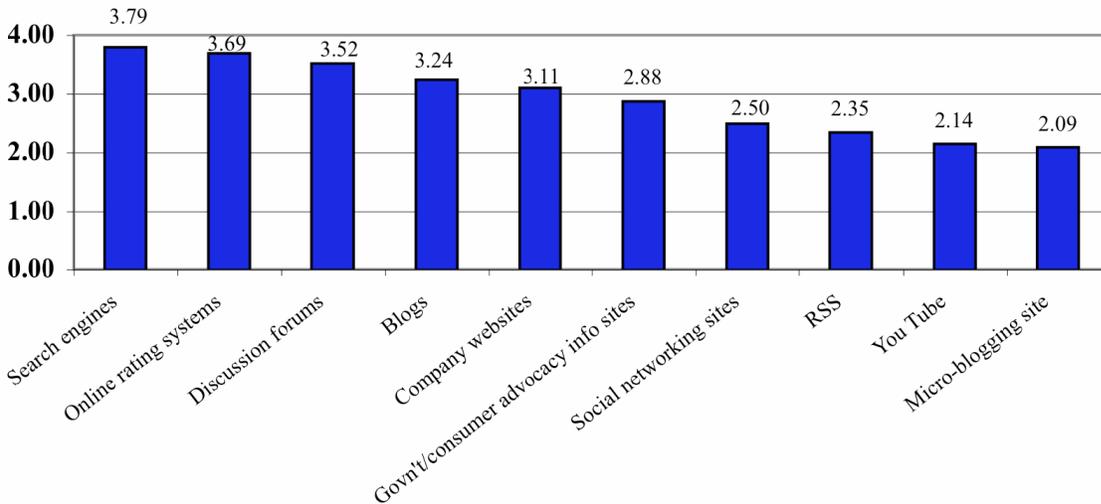
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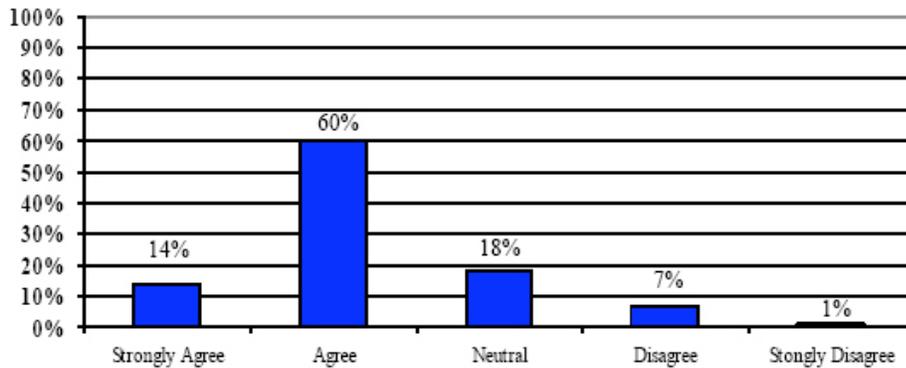
Appendix

Table 1: When making decisions, how valuable are the following information sources?



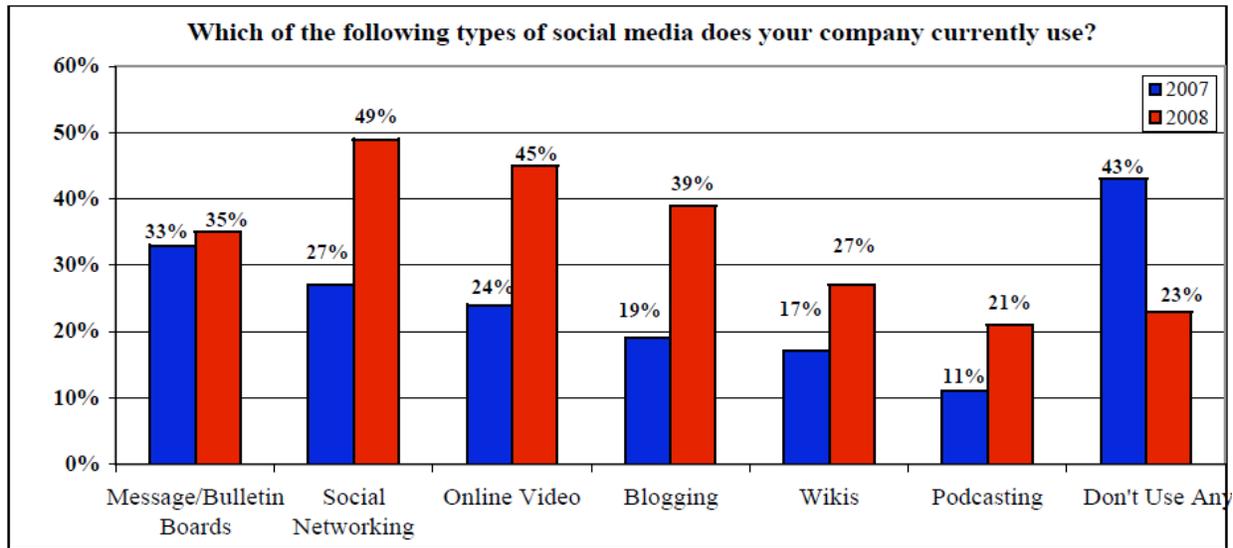
Barnes, N., Cass, J., Getgood, S., Gillin, P., & Gossieaux, F. (2008). *Exploring the link between customer care and brand reputation in the age of social media research study*, p. 12. Retrieved from [http://www.lulu.com/items/volume\\_64/5371000/5371409/1print/Nuance\\_Final.pdf](http://www.lulu.com/items/volume_64/5371000/5371409/1print/Nuance_Final.pdf)

Table 2: I choose companies/brands based on others' customer care experiences shared online.



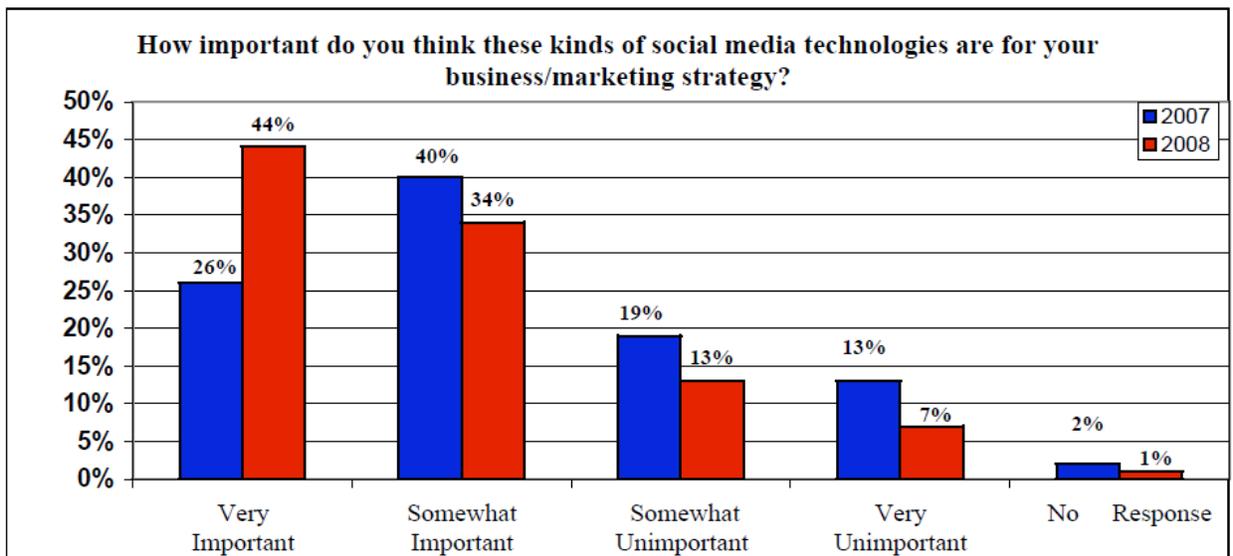
Barnes, N., Cass, J., Getgood, S., Gillin, P., & Gossieaux, F. (2008). *Exploring the link between customer care and brand reputation in the age of social media research study*, p. 12. Retrieved from [http://www.lulu.com/items/volume\\_64/5371000/5371409/1print/Nuance\\_Final.pdf](http://www.lulu.com/items/volume_64/5371000/5371409/1print/Nuance_Final.pdf)

Table 3: Which of the following types of social media does your company currently use?



Barnes, N., & Mattson, E. (2008). Social media in the Inc. 500: The first longitudinal study [Electronic version]. *University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research*. Retrieved from: <http://www.umassd.edu/cmr/studiesresearch/blogstudy5.pdf>

Table 4: How important do you think these kinds of social media technologies are for your business/marketing strategy?



Barnes, N., & Mattson, E. (2008). Social media in the Inc. 500: The first longitudinal study [Electronic

version]. *University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.umassd.edu/cmr/studiesresearch/blogstudy5.pdf>

Table 5: Using social applications in different departments

<b>Using Social Applications in Different Departments</b>			
Companies can deploy social applications in different departments to accomplish a variety of objectives.			
<b>Manager's role or department</b>	<b>Typical groundswell objective</b>	<b>Appropriate social applications</b>	<b>Success metrics</b>
<b>Research and Development</b>	Listening: Gaining insights from customers and using that input in the innovation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand monitoring</li> <li>• Research communities</li> <li>• Innovation communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insights gained</li> <li>• Usable product ideas</li> <li>• Increased speed of development</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing</b>	Talking: Using conversations with customers to promote products or services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Communities</li> <li>• Video on user-generated sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better market awareness</li> <li>• Online "buzz"</li> <li>• Time spent on sites</li> <li>• Increased sales</li> </ul>
<b>Sales</b>	Energizing: Identifying enthusiastic customers and using them to influence others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social networking sites</li> <li>• Brand ambassador programs</li> <li>• Communities</li> <li>• Embeddable "widgets"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community membership</li> <li>• Online "buzz"</li> <li>• Increased sales</li> </ul>
<b>Customer Support</b>	Supporting: Enabling customers to help one another solve problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support forums</li> <li>• Wikis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of members participating</li> <li>• Volume of questions answered online</li> <li>• Decreased volume of support calls</li> </ul>
<b>Operations</b>	Managing: Providing employees with tools so that they can assist one another in finding more effective ways of doing business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal social networks</li> <li>• Wikis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of members participating</li> <li>• Increased operational efficiency</li> <li>• Decreased volume of e-mail</li> </ul>

Bernoff, J., & Li, C. (2008). Harnessing the power of the oh-so-social web [Electronic version]. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 49(3), 41.