

Social Media Advertising In Malaysia: The Power Of Viral Marketing

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ABSTRACT: *Doing business in the Digital Age requires innovation and creativity. The advent of wireless technology that gives rise to Internet and its offspring – social and new media, has altered the way advertising is planned, managed and executed. The shift from mass media to social media advertising has turned the attention of Malaysian audience to viral marketing, where comments, share, likes and buzz measure the success of brands and products. This paper analyzes the viral marketing situation in Malaysia and where it is common to be used by Malaysian brands.*

KEYWORDS – *Viral marketing, social media, brands, advertising, digital age.*

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I INTRODUCTION

The world is now in the era of digital life. In describing the meaning of digital, many offer different way of understanding of the word “digital”. To sum it up, a definition by Karel Dörner and David Edelman in their article “What Digital Really Means” can illustrate how digital can be associated by different facets of people. They said:

“It’s tempting to look for simple definitions, but to be meaningful and sustainable, we believe that digital should be seen less as a thing and more a way of doing things.”

On the bases of the digital life lies the technology that have changed the world. This technological advancement simplified the way mass promotion into direct marketing particularly via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. by way of users’ permission through mutual consent of both parties – sellers and customers. Social media can be a powerful tool when it is part of a comprehensive marketing strategy.

On the same context, viral marketing uses preexisting social sites, and produces heightened brand awareness through replicating processes similar to the spread of a virus. By integrating viral and social media marketing across multiple channels businesses can reach a broader audience.

II LEVERAGING ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR VIRAL MARKETING

The principle behind viral marketing via social media platforms is that it encourages other people to pass on business promotion and marketing message to other potential customers. The advantage of getting these individuals to pass on the marketing message is that they become your marketing team, for free.

Viral marketing on the internet can take the form of video clips, flash games, ebooks, software images, text messages, web pages, memes, and so forth.

According to Investopedia, viral marketing is a deliberate enterprise that spreads quickly and widely across its audience. In viral marketing, distribution of a message happens organically. As such, social media provides the perfect ecosystem for viral marketing, though it has its roots in traditional word-of-mouth marketing.

As new internet businesses were being created in extreme numbers in the 2000s, viral marketing is still common among internet-based business-to-consumer (B-to-C) companies. The widespread adoption of social networks, including YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Whatapps, Wechat and Facebook, has enabled modern viral marketing efforts and increased their efficacy.

The marketing buzz (buzzwords) produces an increase in brand awareness to achieve marketing objectives, usually sales, through 'viruses' that spreads by word of mouth and by the internet. Peaked in popularity in the late 1990s and 2000s, viral marketing was previously known as word of mouth marketing.

Today, the innovation of internet has provided viral marketing a number of ways to engage in word of mouth marketing efficiently at potentially a very low cost marketing budget. According to experts, viral marketing works when it meets the following three criteria:

- i. **Messenger** that includes: the subject that receives, the subject's social connection and the amplifying receiver.
- ii. **Message** that is both memorable and interesting to be passed on to others.
- iii. **Environment** that includes timing, context, culture and other specific subjects.

The ultimate goal in creating successful viral marketing programs is to create messages that appeal to individuals with high social networking potential (or influencers) and that are likely to be liked and shared by these individuals as well as their competitors in their communications with others in a short period of time.

To do this, the golden rule is that the message should be clear, concise and emotionally appealing. For example, the Dove's Real Beauty Sketches campaign reached to 4 billion Public Relations (PR) and blogger media impressions and still counting due to the uniqueness of the campaign. Dove Skin VP Fernando Machado told Business Insider in 2013 that the video first launched in four key markets: the U.S., Canada, Brazil, and Australia. It was then rolled out abroad, and uploaded in 25 languages and seen in 110 countries.

Machado said, the brand partnered with YouTube and Unruly to facilitate the distribution and seeding strategy. According to him, PR served as a key channel, generating initial placements with media such as the Today Show, Mashable, Huffington Post and Channel 7 Morning Show in Australia. He claimed that the film was distributed to top media around the world and was quickly shared by women, men, media and even other brands.

III THE ADVANTAGES OF VIRAL MARKETING

Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. is where people share, meet and greet, virtually. As social media's popularity increases, these sites have become a common place to visit while people are online. However, it seems that the relationship can be extended to actual relationship and not merely virtual. More than half of the internet's population has at least one account, creating an ecosystem so massive that it holds a tremendous capacity to be effective. Hence, viral marketing is the answer.

Azizan Osman, the Malaysian marketing guru in encouraging the usage of viral marketing said, that viral marketing has many powerful benefits, mainly because:

- A majority of consumers actively participate in social networking activities on a daily basis.
- Mobility of the information distributed through social media tends to travel from person to person very quickly.
- Since people are "friends" on social media, information passed is regarded to be of a certain level of credibility.
- Messages are pushed and delivered directly to the desktops/laptops/mobile phones of a captive audience.
- People who actively engage in social networking tend to utilize it as a resources for giving and receiving information.

When a message went viral, marketers can just look and observe with less to nothing they can do to stop or control it. As said earlier, viral marketing is like creating a virus - just watch it spread until it reaches its peak before it finally becomes irritating and "antibodies" began to wipe it away.

Viral videos, memes, viral comments, status updates, tweets, blogs, and pins and so on all serve one thing. An immediate burst of interest, a 15 second fame, a spur of the moment spike in the content sharing activity due to the culmination of multiple factors, generating mass curiosity using extreme emotions.

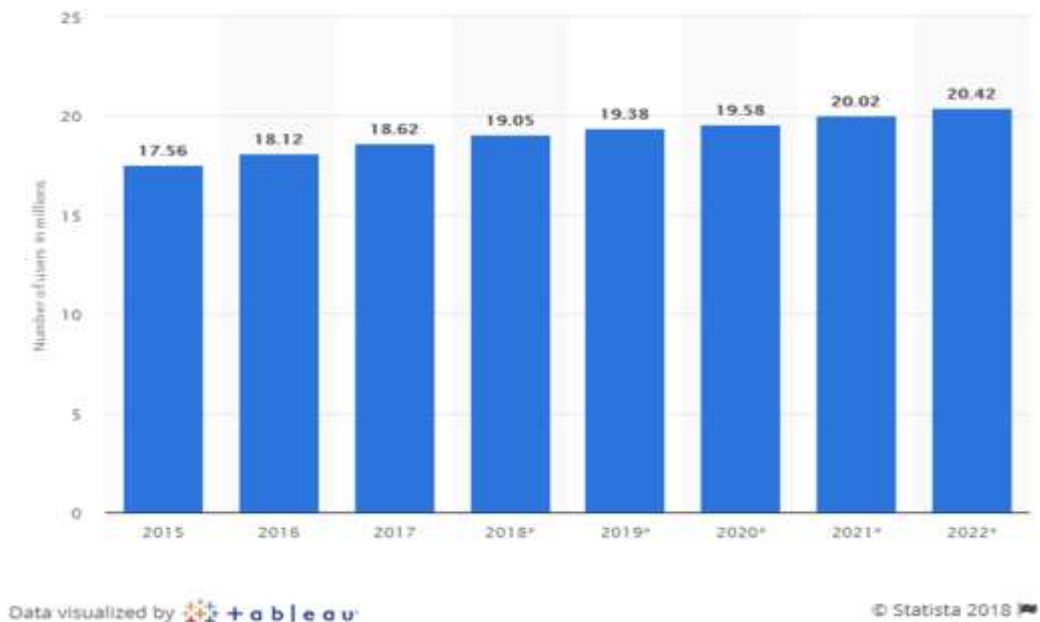
People will either love it or hate but won't ignore it, resulting in a large number of shares, views and a large volume of the ensuing discussions. Of course, viral marketing is best done for a short burst of time, therefore timing must be right. Many viral marketing approaches have been used over the years, but while they were able to capture large numbers of users, they proved ineffective for long-term campaign, unless the key messages were re-hashed and refreshed after some lapse time.

While it is a marketing strategy that may deflate over time, viral marketing does increase brand awareness. Thus increasing the effectiveness of your business marketing strategy. It is like the most memorable first impressions where the likes, shares, and "15-minutes of fame" that can benefit the brand in a number of ways, such as:

1. Lower Advertising Costs – While initially your campaign may need a little push (perhaps paid promotion on social media), as it begins to get picked up by your audience, they will do the sharing for you and you can pull back on your advertising expense.
2. Fast Growth – Compared to conventional marketing campaign, viral marketing is one of very few tactics that has the potential to create explosive growth in a very little time.
3. Mainstream Media Exposure, for free – Viral marketing, when done correctly, gives media outlets a reason to cover your brand without you paying or petitioning for it. The beautiful part about getting mainstream media coverage is in itself creates virality as smaller media outlets follow the stories pushed by the big names.
4. Increased Credibility – When your brand "goes viral" and grabs the attention of a new audience, more people are willing to give it a chance.
5. Rapid Lead Generation – People always gravitate to trending topics. Everyone might not be ready to purchase from you just yet, but when you attract enough attention, they certainly want to keep you in mind for when they are ready.

IV VIRAL MARKETING SCENARIO IN MALAYSIA

Just recently, statistica.com reported that there were 18.62 million Malaysians who were social media users in 2017 and the number is expected to increase to 20.42 million in 2022 (as illustrated in Graph 1). The numbers are the evidence that Malaysians are media social consumers at the highest scale.



Graph 1: Numbers of media social users in Malaysia from 2015 – 2022

On the social media platforms, Facebook used to be number one site hooked on by Malaysians however the latest statistic by GlobalStat shows a decrease in April 2018, down almost 22 per cent from 95.48 per cent in April 2017 (As shown in Table 1).

Date	Facebook	Twitter	Pinterest	YouTube	Instagram	Tumblr	reddit	LinkedIn	Google+	StumbleUpon	VKontakte	Other
2017-04	95.48	1.34	1.77	0.1	0.33	0.57	0.15	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.03	0.01
2017-05	95.24	1.45	1.36	0.61	0.37	0.48	0.18	0.1	0.09	0.07	0.03	0.01
2017-06	92.81	2.03	2.06	1.16	0.8	0.58	0.18	0.15	0.12	0.07	0.03	0.02
2017-07	92.26	2.41	2.34	1.21	0.67	0.63	0.19	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.01	0.02
2017-08	93.37	1.9	2.05	1.24	0.62	0.39	0.21	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.01	0.01
2017-09	92.02	2.29	2.55	1.43	0.66	0.47	0.29	0.09	0.11	0.07	0.02	0.01
2017-10	92.58	2.23	2.31	1.12	0.75	0.45	0.29	0.11	0.08	0.05	0.02	0.01
2017-11	90.47	2.78	2.39	2.44	0.92	0.45	0.26	0.14	0.08	0.06	0.02	0.01
2017-12	85.92	3.73	3.22	4.53	1.05	0.66	0.45	0.14	0.11	0.08	0.03	0.07
2018-01	82.49	4.86	4.65	5.02	1.11	0.81	0.43	0.13	0.19	0.11	0.04	0.15
2018-02	81.83	5.79	4.1	5.37	1.27	0.75	0.42	0.11	0.15	0.11	0.04	0.06
2018-03	80.88	5.61	4.23	6.12	1.57	0.81	0.32	0.12	0.18	0.1	0.03	0.02
2018-04	77.97	6.07	5.87	6.86	1.53	0.92	0.37	0.12	0.17	0.08	0.04	0.01

Table 1: Popular social media sites in Malaysia April 2017 – April 2018

Nonetheless, it is a known fact that Malaysians are the consumer of viral marketing and the interest can be seen peaked on certain issues such as ridiculous video clips, sensational singing or immoral act caught on video. As noted by viral website Oh Bulan! the word “viral” in Malaysia almost synonymous with nonsense video clips. The website listed six items of the most viral in Malaysia – the recording of nonsense behaviors, foods, talents like singing or dancing, cheap sale promotions, top vacation on a budget, and accidents or road bullies in action.

In a study by Wan Hong and YusnizaKamarulzaman in 2016, it was found that most Malaysian respondents have repeated forwarding behaviour, are willing to carry out this act and have a high engagement in using mobile messaging application, WhatsApp. This shows the potential of WhatsApp as a viral marketing tool in Malaysia.

This study indicates that with such openness to participate in viral marketing, marketing managers in Malaysia may assess the feasibility of incorporating this tool into their advertising strategy. In addition, advertising agencies may also include WhatsApp viral marketing as one of the advertising options for their clients in order to leverage the benefits of viral marketing.

It was also found that Malaysian WhatsApp users love jokes, informative messages, funny advertisements and inspirational messages. These four types of message range from useful messages (informative) to amusing messages with entertainment value (jokes). Malaysian users prefer the elements of the message rather than the type of message and are open to advertisements if the theme of the message suits their taste.

The result of the study also shows that marketers should pursue a marketing message that would bring about a positive consumers’ attitude and should keep that in mind when designing a marketing message. In order to be successful in the viral marketing campaign, maintaining the interest of consumers is crucial, and the marketing message must not revolve around the interests of the organization. Therefore, straightforward and boring text advertisements that revolve around the information of the organization may no longer be welcome among Malaysian users.

Another interesting note on Malaysian companies’ viral marketing strategy is that they collaborate with established websites such as www.lowyat.com, famous bloggers such as Paul Tan (monthly traffic average 5.7 million) that have millions of followers to ensure the virality of the marketing campaign. Product ambassadors from the likes of famous actors and actresses as well as singers, athletes, etc. also set the tone of the viral online marketing promotions.

Positive impact of viral marketing in Malaysia has been noted by researchers, Hariani, Noraishah and Intan Liana in their paper, Positive Impact of Viral Marketing via Social Media: A Case Study in Company A. They found that advertising via social media is crucial in promoting products of the said company in market.

According to them, Facebook remains the most popular social media platform chosen by respondents. However they noted that to more effectively market their product, the said company needs to diversify its choice media social platform and not rely on Facebook alone.

All in all, the study by Hariani et al. benefitted the viral marketing field that consider it as an essential tool of promotion that companies should adopt properly in order to increase sales in the market at a lower cost.

V CONCLUSION

Viral marketing is a powerful tool that spans across many boundaries and borders. For companies to achieve a success in viral marketing it should integrate this with conventional media like print media, electronic media etc. and work with established website to push their message along. In Malaysia, viral marketing has set its foot in the market and been accepted positively by both companies and consumers. It may face many challenges to breach new frontier but for the meantime, viral marketing is here to stay in Malaysia.

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