



The Evolution Of Viral Marketing Transactions During The Pandemic Corona Period

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Abstract :

The aim of this research was to analyze the atrocious speed experienced by the phenomenon of the marketing virus between the academic studies and its strategic application by companies. Based on the analytical approach of the content, the paper has raised a main question, which is “what are the most crucial viral marketing methods that can be adopted in the span of Corona?”. The paper came to the following denouement, which is the need for the institution to restraint the marketing virus and its control over the websites through which its image can be disturbed, especially in light of the current crisis (Covid 19 crisis). It would have been more convenient for the institutions to adopt the viral marketing to build vigorous relationships with the current and potential customers in order to value the mental image of their products or bolster them through a high integration strategy.

Key Words: Viral Marketing, Mental Image, Hotmail, Taobao, Amazon.

JEL Classification : M31

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Introduction:

In light of the ferocity of fear that has exhausted the world since December 2019, viruses and infection has become one of the most terrible things that people are very attracted to, especially the Corona virus. However, marketing men have raised a controversy about the existence of other infectious viruses twenty-three years ago, When Jeffrey Rayport (a professor at Harvard Business university) has used the term “viral marketing” in an article he published in December 1996. In 1997, the term has been popularized by Tim Draper and Steve Graveston when they addressed the impact of e-mail (Benali, 2019). In light of all these events taking place around us, which were produced by the Corona pandemic, viral marketing has become an inevitable necessity for the organization, especially with the social distancing measures and quarantine regulations imposed by most countries.

Problematic of the Study: In light of what has been presented above, we ask the following question:

What are the most significant viral marketing strategies that the organization can adopt in light of the Corona pandemic?



This main question includes a number of sub-questions that can be asked as follows:

- What is the viral marketing?
- What are the viral marketing strategies?
- What are the most important ways that can be relied on in the organized marketing virus in light of the Corona crisis?

Hypothesis

- Viral marketing is considered as one of the most important permanent activities followed by institutions to reach their customers and gain new customers (increase its sales) during the Corona period.
- Most of the institutions rely on the high integration strategy to spread its advertising messages among its customers and motivate them to pass it between them.
- Many of the institutions that relied on the viral marketing were able to increase their sales volume during the Corona period.

Significance of the Study: The significance of the research lies in the relevance and importance of the topic in the current situation, the topic of viral marketing is one of the opportunities that have been described by the learning organizations as riding in the tide. The latter has achieved colossal sales by adopting the marketing virus during the Corona crisis; therefore, the subject has acquired tremendous importance in modern academic studies.

Objective of Study: This research aims to present a comprehensive theoretical framework about the philosophical trends that dealt with the concept of the viral marketing in addition to the stages of its development and the strategies adopted in it. Added to this, the most significant tools used by this type of marketing by focusing on the methods adopted in light of the Corona pandemic. Moreover, this research aims to present many divergent aspects of the concept of the viral marketing to diminish the repercussions of Corona.

I. What is the Viral Marketing?

The Viral marketing is a phenomenon and concept that has escalated widely in recent years, especially with the terrible evolution of the Internet and digital media, which made it a subject of great interest by many researchers trying to provide a definition of it. Therefore, will try to address the most essential definitions provided by researchers in this field:

In 2010, Miller and his colleagues have defined it as the creation of a self-perpetuating message through its circulation among Internet users in an incremental and expeditious manner. (Miller, etal 2010, p. 5) . It is participatory marketing where the recipient of the offer or message is at the center of the communication strategy, and in fact, the consumers are the ones, who directly contribute to the offer through electronic word of mouth. (guyot, 2016). The Viral marketing is defined as a strategy that encourages individuals to deliver and market a message to others and creates the potential to grow at an increasing rate in the presentation of the message in the presentation of the message (Kaple, Kulkarni, & Potika, 2017) .It is also known as



directing an advertising message on the Internet and building a customer base with little expense by providing an immediate and adequate welfare to users that pushes them to spread advertising messages by recruiting new customers. (Jankowski, Zioło, Karczmarczyk, & Wątróbski, 2018) . Some experts define it as a marketing phenomenon that facilitates and encourages individuals to pass the marketing message voluntarily through the social networking using network sites to transmit the spoken word. (Zhang & Huang, 2021) .It is also defined as a marketing phenomenon that facilitates and encourages individuals to pass marketing messages (Tregrove, 2021).Simply put, the viral marketing is one of the marketing techniques that uses the Internet, social networking and technologies to encourage people to engage in word of mouth creating the potential for exponential growth in the dissemination and impact of the message. (Simmonds, Campbell, & Hasley, 2021)

II. The Emergence and Spread of the Viral Marketing.

The history of the viral marketing goes back to 1992, as the media critic Douglas Rashkoff first wrote about it, focusing on the viral media reaches the customer via the Internet at a high speed and a powerful influence, which ensures that the organization easily convey its message to its customers and convinces them at the lowest possible cost. It is possible that the message will not reach more than the target, to their friends and relatives. For this reason, marketing has likened the method to the way the virus spreads in its surroundings, as an infected person with the virus can rapidly spread it.

In 1996, another writer named Draper das brought up the term again, as he described in detail the strategy used by Hotmail, which was based on the idea that the marketing message sent by email to everyone should be followed with the a statement that says “Now you can get your own free email” ". Thus, the first to apply the concept of the viral marketing was the Hotmail Company, which had a significant influence on the users' exposure to the ad as the first viral ad experience. (Ahmad & Lasi, 2020)

In 1996, the concept of the viral marketing was put forward again by another writer named Jeffrey Rayport, a professor at Harvard Business university, Where he emphasized that this concept depends on the customer in the process of promoting the product via the Internet instead of the salesman, which means “the customer replaces the marketing man” (Rayport, 1996). Jeffrey was the first to put forward the term viral marketing on a purely academic level, while the first to apply the concept of the viral marketing was Steve and Time, through the free Hotmail website, to advertise this site and dismantle the message to the network users, urging them to broadcast the message they receive (Ligery & Swastika, 2020)

Friedman indicates that the concept of viral marketing is based on the concept of the spoken word and the use of the Internet as a common means of transmitting information at high speed. Added to this, it enables individuals to see the advertisements on various sites in order to make comparisons and choose offers. (Friedman, 2008)



It should also be noted that the viral marketing has existed even before the evolution of the Internet in the form of what is known as whispering. However, its use has doubled gratefulness to the ease of sending and spreading information, especially with the new versions of WAP that allow the user to participate in the production of information by publishing digital contents through blogs and various social networks. (Jendoubi & Martin, 2020) At that point Hotmail website is considered as the first classical example of the viral marketing, as it represents the first free Internet services that rely on a simple strategy that includes:

- Giving free email addresses and services.
- Attaching a card at the bottom of each free message sent says that the user gets a free mail on the site (Hotmail.com).
- Sending messages to friends and acquaintances.
- Motivating individuals to spread the message.
- Signing up for a free email service.
- Encouraging sending the message to friends, acquaintances and partners on a continuous and increasing basis.

III. The Viral Marketing Strategies :

Viral marketing strategies are divided into two main groups, depending on the degree of customer's paper in the marketing process, which are:

1. Low Integration Strategy:

In this strategy, the role of the customer is lower in the advertising and propaganda process, (Ahmed, 2018) where the message that the person receives is republished again in his site by clicking on the sent message (Uğurlu, 2020). The sender gets a reward from the website that sent the message. This strategy is used to publish a wide variety of products that Internet organizations deal with it. (Sivathanu, 2017)

2. High Integration strategy:

This strategy is based on informing its users (Ahmed, 2018) about the presence of their colleagues registered on the mailing lists (Ali, 2021) . The more users are encouraged to use the website (Granata & Scozzese, 2018), the more advantages they will get, the more they will be motivated to spread the message. (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Amazon Company has achieved a considerable success in motivating (馮昕, 2020) and directing (Tiwary, 2020)its users to yield new customers towards the home page of the company's website. The strategy was also used the technique called "Skype brand" to promote through its reliance on the spoken word (Delello, McWhorter, & Camp, 2015). And to encourage individuals to download the program, informing others, and transmitting advertising links among them. (Yanua, Azman, & Nurrahmi, 2021).

According to Wilson (2000), In order to make the viral marketing strategy very effective, there are some aspects must be taken into consideration; which are:

- Improving and facilitating transportation for the others.
- Giving a dimension to the products or services, i.e. giving the strongest word to the products or services through valuable programs or services to attract attention.



- The marketing message should be easy to convert, multiply and download.
- The need for influential and eminent incentives and smart viral marketing plans that exploit the common human incentives.
- Taking advantage of the advantages of the other sources.

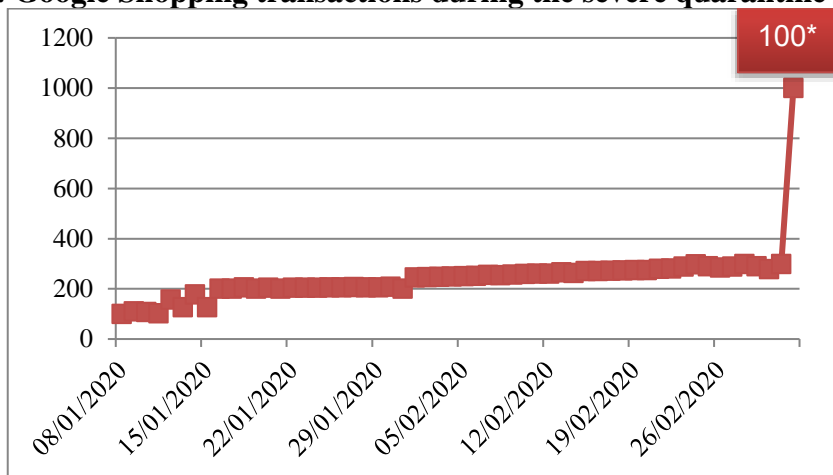
IV. Successful experiences of the viral marketing:

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has created a pandemic situation in 2020 that has had a profound and severe impact on the global economy (Sarkees, 2021). Decision makers around the world have responded to this pandemic by encouraging individuals to limit face-to-face contact with others (David & Roberts, 2021). Social distancing, self-isolation, and isolation were some of the suggestions that people heard from the news and social media every day (Marston, Musselwhite, & Hadley, 2020). Among the institutions that have used the viral marketing as a prop to compensate or increase their sales, we mentioned:

1. GOOGLE Company:

The arrival of Google to the stage of domination and superiority of the public search services market (Beltrán & Gulc, 2021), and its transformation into a portal of the exchanged information on the Internet prompted it to exploit its ability to control this market and to dominate the neighboring markets of that market (Jitsuzumi, 2020). Therefore, it succeeded in controlling the market for comparative shopping services through Google Shopping laboratories. During the Corona pandemic, Google shopping transactions jumped to more than 1,000,000 customers in one day. As it is shown in the following figure:

Fig 1: Google Shopping transactions during the severe quarantine period.



Source: Prepared by researchers based on data (google trends, 2021)

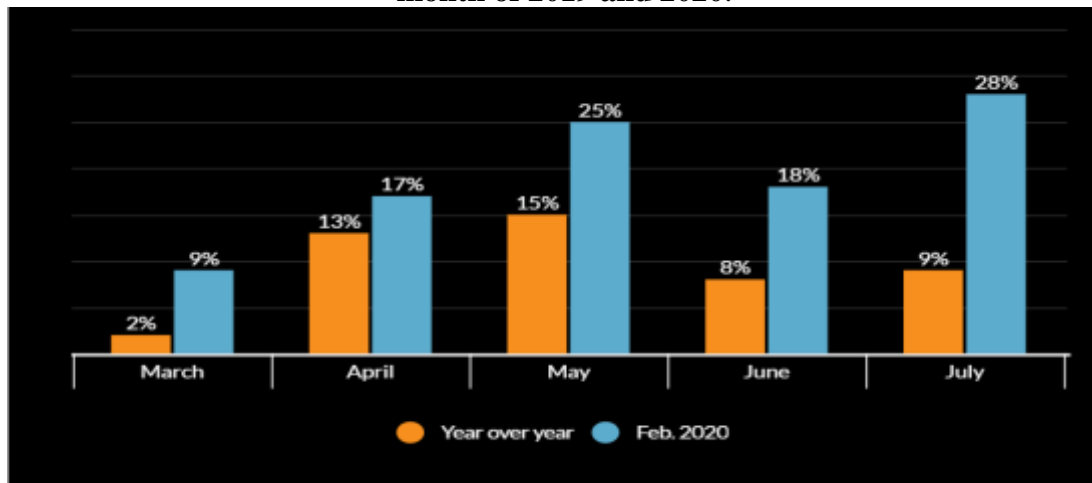
2. Amazon Company:

Amazon Company has experienced an increase in the traffic to its website during the quarantine period of the year 2020. This continued even after the quarantine was



lifted, as the traffic rate to the website has increased in July by 28.1% compared to February 2020, and an annual increase of 8.7%, As it is shown in following :

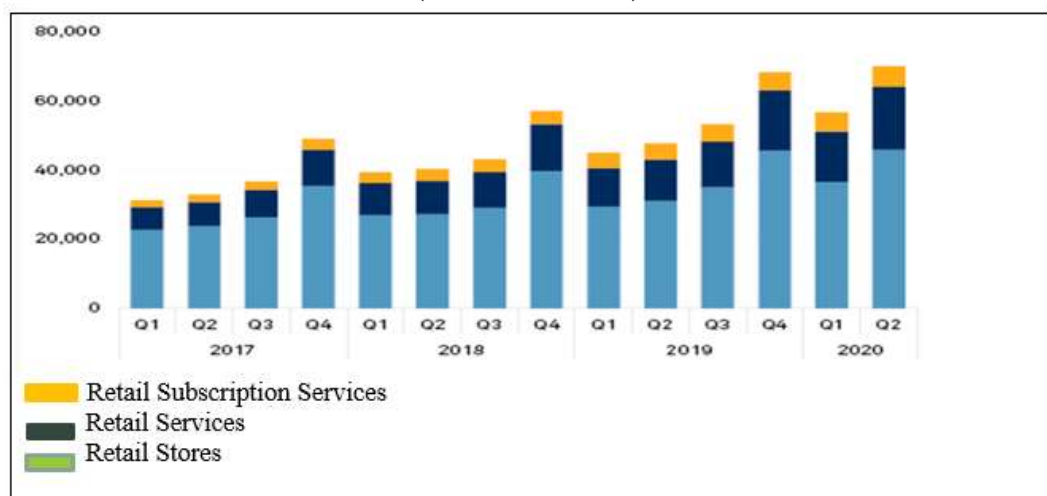
Fig 2: the growth of the traffic to the Amazon website compared to the same month of 2019 and 2020:



Source: (aleksandra , 2021)

Through the figure, we notice a significant increase in the volume of access to the company's website during the first months of the quarantine period. This increase had an effective impact on the growth of the number of the company's customers. The company's e-commerce revenues also has witnessed a significant increase during the severe quarantine period, which coincided with the second quarter of 2020, by 0.47%, as its sales during this period amounted to 70.11 billion dollars, exceeding the highest sales number recorded in 2019 estimated at \$68.34 billion, as shown in the following figure

Fig 3: Amazon E-Commerce Quarterly Revenue based on the Business Type (Million Dollars)



Source: (estimates kagan, Octobre 2020)

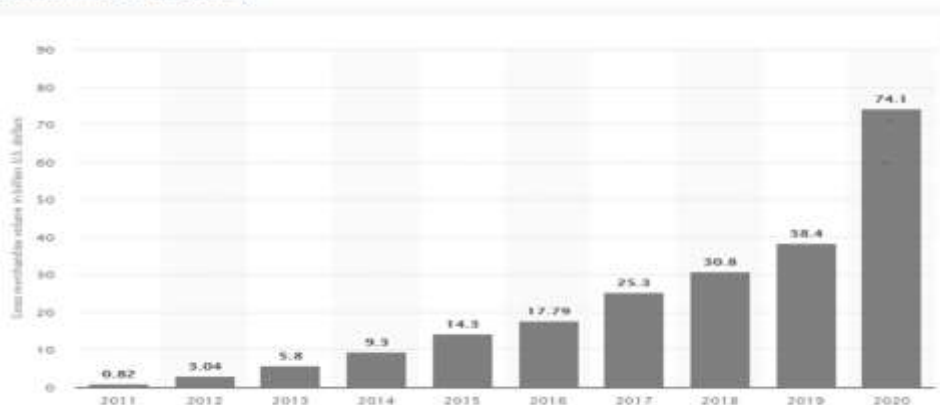


3. platform Taobao e-commerce and shopping platform

The sales volume of Taobao during the quarantine period reached its highest level compared to previous years, reaching 38.4 billion US dollars in 2019 and 74.1 billion US dollars in 2020. This huge rise indicates that despite the Covid-19 crisis that the platform has experienced, it was not negatively affected, but rather the sales value doubled. This indicates and confirms that Taobao has been able to control the situation. The following figure shows the increase in the sales volume from 2011 to 2020.

Fig 4: Taobao sales value for day 11-11 from 2011 to 2020

(billion U.S. dollars)



Source: (2022، سميحة و كرومي)

4. Increasing the access of the American citizens on the websites:

The Corona pandemic has accelerated the transition to online shopping. We note, in the following figure, an increase in the access to the websites by the American citizens during the first half of 2020, which coincided with the severe quarantine period by 18.6%, accompanied by a significant decrease in retail sales. According to the analysis of the Digital Commerce 360 to the US Department of Commerce data, Consumers spent \$347.26 billion in the online stores with the American sellers in the first six months of 2020. It was estimated at \$266.84 billion in 2019, an increase of 30.1% over the same period in 2019.

Fig 4:U.S retail laldscape during first of 2020
Year-over-year comparison of Jan- June retail data in \$billions



Source: (aleksandra , 2021)

Conclusion:

The Viral marketing is considered as one of the most significant strategies that can be relied upon by the marketer, especially during crises that need to reduce the proportion of direct contact with the customer. As happened with the Corona crisis and the customer stayed away from contact with the surroundings of the institution, which required the marketer to resort to several electronic methods. Perhaps the viral marketing was one of the most used methods in this case due to its low cost (crises require an austerity policy), and the terrifying speed with which he delivers the message and the strength of its spread in a very short period. Therefore, the intelligent marketer who is aware of the reality of things adopts viral marketing with a high integration strategy in order to satisfy the customer's desires towards the institution and achieve the goals of the organization at the same time. This is what giant institutions such as Google, Hotmail, Amazon and Facebook have taken.

Results

- The Corona crisis has created an unparalleled atmosphere; it led to the formation of a distance between the institution and its customers, which made it necessary for the institutions to find solutions to compensate for this distance.
- Viral marketing is of a great importance in the practical life, this has been proven by the pioneering experiences in marketing, as it provides the fastest and broadest methods to transfer information.
- Many companies, such as Google and Amazon, have adopted viral marketing during the Corona pandemic to reach their customers and gain new customers; this is what we have noticed through the successful experiences of these companies, which contributed in increasing the number of surfers to its websites.
- The high integration strategy is considered as one of the most important viral marketing strategies adopted by institutions to spread their advertising messages among their customers due to the advantages and incentives it provides to its



users In return for publishing its messages. This is what amazon.com has achieved by motivating and directing its users to gain new customers towards the home page of the company's website.

- The Viral marketing has contributed significantly in increasing the number of the companies' customers during the Corona period, thus, an increase in its online sales during this period.
- The trend of the customers to the electronic transactions during the Corona period has contributed in consolidating the culture of buying through the online stores more and more, as the behavior continued even after the end of the quarantine period.
- Recommendations and Suggestions
- The need to increase attention to the benefit of viral campaigns as a basic and important element of the company's promotional mix.
- The need to work on increasing the reliability between the customer and the institution with an electronic connection.
- Mainstreaming the use of the viral marketing as an effective marketing strategy for the Algerian companies.

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