Viral Marketing and the New Competitive Advantage

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Abstract: The role played by viral marketing has received considerable academic and digital media attention recently. Key issues in viral marketing have been examined through the lens of the mode of marketing message transmission, including self-replicating on the basis of quality difference, individuals' emotional needs, as well as how users are connected across various social networks. This paper presents a review and analysis of viral marketing studies from 2001 to the present day. It investigates how viral marketing facilitate the diffusion of social media products and the relationship between marketers and these product users by taking a look at the implementation of viral marketing in two European online game firms Jagex Games Studio and Rovio Entertainment. The results from this review and analysis indicate that viral marketing plays an important role in accelerating the interaction between marketers and users (as well as the user groups) in the field of digital media and high tech consumption. Therefore, it is evident that firms should understand the social contagion process and target well-connected users purposefully in order to create its competitive advantage.

Keywords: viral marketing, marketing message transmission, social media, competitive advantage

Introduction

Digital media enables the diffusion of viral marketing due to users' intensive connection with the internet. For example, the US television drama House of Cards, an adaption of the BBC series with the same title, had become a global phenomenon in the virtual world in 2014 when public figures such as the US President Barack Obama sent the Twitter message: "Tomorrow: @HouseOfCards. No spoilers, please" to his 41 million followers the day before the release of the second series on Netflix (Little 2014). Indeed, other television broadcasters are also heavily dependent on Twitters for marketing; Bulkley (2014) reported that "around 40% of all primetime tweets from the UK's 15 million monthly active Twitter users were about TV". This paper will explore competitive advantages associated with viral marketing among digital media firms within advanced economies, in particularly, with an in-depth focus of online games. We will first define the concept of viral marketing and provide an overview of its use in the context of digital media. Then we will discuss the case study methodology we use. The third section will look at the implementation of viral marketing in Jagex and Rovio and how it enables the two firms to market blockbuster games.

The final section will discuss the challenges of viral marketing before we arrive at the conclusion.

Literature Review

Viral marketing depends on the repeated transmission of a message through peer-to-peer dissemination using social network sites, and has been and is prevailing among digital media products and drives the shift from "above-the-line" to "below-the-line" marketing activities; its researchers such as Laudon and Traver (2001, p. 381) defined it as "the process of getting customers to pass along a company's marketing message to friends, family, and colleagues". The increasing reliance of interpersonal communication through social blogs, social networks, video sharing and forums to guide our purchasing decisions has been addressed by Goldenberg et al. (2001), Hill et al. (2006) and Iyengar (2011). However, theoretical perspectives had interpreted the mode of transmissions of marketing message differently; for instance, Dawkins (1976) and Blackmore (1999) perceived viral messages diffused like a social epidemic, and were self-replicating on the basis of their distinctive qualities. Psychologists such as Allport and Postman (1945) and Rimié (2009), on the other hand, have suggested individuals' emotional needs are key in transmitting viral messages.

Though it is a relatively new concept, Schulze et al. (2014) was able to summarize the research knowledge of viral marketing into six major areas: (a) social position of the sender and the receiver, (b) message content, (c) sender-receiver relationship, (d) communication exclusivity, (e) expressed interest and (f) message features. In particularly, researchers covered widely the first two areas and were interested in users' connection across different social networks as well as whether the content of the message was funny, inspirational and shocking. It should also be noted that Hinz et al. (2011) explored the seeding strategies in relation to viral marketing campaign.

Marketing of digital media products has been and is entwined with viral marketing, which utilizes the collective power of groups to spread marketing message through a snow ball effect, via social media led by Twitters, Facebook and Youtube. For example, in recent years UK digital media firms in television programme production rely on global distributors such as ITV, Channel 4, Sky and BBC to market their programmes through viral marketing campaigns (Televisual, 2012). It can be seen in August 2014 that there were 345,000 followers of Channel 4 in Twitters. They were able to view the tweets or messages generated by the broadcasters as well as those created elsewhere, but which were re-directed to the Channel 4 account. By building networked conversations around television programmes, Channel 4 enabled messages passed on by individuals with those connected to them virtually, who in turn infected those connected to them, capitalizing an electronic word-of-mouth. This differs significantly from the conventional marketing concept where firms first identify their market segments and reach the target audience through specific marketing campaign. The boundary of conventional marketing and viral marketing, nevertheless, is somewhat porous as advertisement for games developed with conventional marketing such as Xbox's trailer for the game Halo franchise, could also be found on YouTube, becoming a global hit through electronic word-of-mouth in the social media. Indeed Microsoft's trailer for Halo: Nightfall First Look attracted over 2 million YouTube viewers within a month of its release; this illustrates the cost effectiveness of social media in the connection of players.

However, player feedbacks on social media can be positive and negative.

The use of viral marketing has been enhanced by technological development in conversation mapping technology that can identify users talking about certain online games, television programmes or magazines, allowing marketers to target. In a study of Twitter conversation around political issues, Pew Research Centre (2014) identified six types of network communication clusters: polarized crowd, tight crowd, broadcast network, support network, community clusters and brand clusters. They found that the "brand clusters", which contained users of global brands such as Apple iPhone, did not communicate among themselves, but contained "commentary from many disconnected participants" (ibid. p. 3). Put it another way, the "brand clusters" contains a large population of small disconnected groups where users were mainly isolated and twitted about the issue rather than to each other. As Pew Research Centre elaborated: "The larger the population talking about a brand the less likely it is that the participants are connected to one another. Brand-mentioning participants focus on a topic, but tend not to connect to each other".

Viral marketing is at the heart of the conversation clusters within these social media and they are extremely useful in passing on the marketing message. But what motivates users to pass on these messages? Schutz's (1966) Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO framework) suggested that interpersonal communication was based on three interpersonal needs: inclusion (need to be part of a group/need for attention), affection (show appreciation and concern for others) and control (need to exert power in one's social environment). Building on this model, Ho and Dempsey (2010) put forward four key motivations: the need to be part of a group, the need to be individualistic, the need to be altruistic and the need for personal growth. They found those who perceive themselves as opinion leaders were more willing to disseminate the message and share their comments in order to illustrate uniqueness. Also, their survey of approximately six hundred young adults suggested that those who had greater concern for others were more likely to pass on the marketing message (ibid.).

In exploring the use of viral marketing by Britney Spears, Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) concluded that the success of the singer in launching "Hold it Against Me" and "Femme Fatale" revolved around the interplay of her marketers' postings on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook as well as her own comments on her webpage. They concluded that the implementation of cutting edge viral marketing campaign required choosing the relevant social media in terms of frequency of updates, longevity of the social media application, consistency across different social media sites, creativity and authentic. They stated that one should: a. choosing the social media carefully – social media sites such as Twitters would suit firms requiring interactivity whereas web page/blog could suit less frequent posting, b. pick the application or make your own – it is important to have a site that will last (for example, the decline of MySpace after the launch of Facebook meant that Britney Spears had to migrate to Facebook too), c. ensure activity alignment and media plan integration – the information available on different social media sites should be consistent, d. be active and interesting – firms should avoid using social media sites simply to distribute marketing message (for example, Britney Spears social media team met the taste of her fans by leaking demo tapes, posting teasers, and spreading the product launch over a period of several weeks) and e. be unprofessional and honest – the language used is colloquial and it is

explicitly clearly the author of the post. Though some of these points such as building your own sites seem less relevant these days due to the power of media giants such as Facebook over people's daily lives, Kaplan and Haenlein (op cit.) succinctly summarized the practicality of implementing efficient and effective viral marketing.

Building on previous literature in relation to the content, context and mode of diffusion of viral marketing, this paper will examine the ways viral marketing facilitates the diffusion of digital media products and how marketers manage their relationships with the users of these products.

Methodology

Based on the interpretive research paradigm, this paper adopted the qualitative methodology focussing on the longitudinal case study of Jagex Games Studio and Rovio Entertainment. The qualitative nature of the research provides deeper and richer understanding of how viral marketing enhances firm competitiveness (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1989; Creswell, 2009), and is appropriate in understanding its implementation process and the subsequent social contagion that underlies its marketing significance. The two firms were chosen as they had utilized viral marketing to launch blockbuster online games since their early days. Yin (1993, p.13) defined a case study as: "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." The use of case study in this paper therefore allowed an explicit understanding of viral marketing practices in the context of the fast changing online game market.

As Jagex and Rovio were established in 2001 and 2003 respectively, background data of the two firms throughout the 2000s and early 2010s were collected from the public domain such as firm websites and relevant social media sites. In addition, primary data was obtained from personal interviews with twelve game players in 2013; the respondents, aged between 15 and 45, took part in semi-structured interviews that explored their interface with viral marketing strategies. Three online game marketers were also interviewed in order to provide further information on the evolution of viral marketing within the industry. Secondary data used included industry interviews and reports. Consequently, a large volume of textual materials was generated. The following section will discuss the pattern emerged from the data analysis, which illustrates the underlying dynamism of viral marketing in online games.

Results

In this section, we will examine how two European online games firms Jagex Games Studio and Rovio Entertainment utilized viral marketing to successfully launch and market their respective games Runescape and Angry Birds. Runescape is a medieval fantasy massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) that takes place in the world of Gielinox, and players could participate in the game through customizable avatars. As a contrast, Angry Birds is a puzzle game in relation to the dark side of humanity - destruction and revenge, where the birds are angry and want to get back at the pigs that stole their eggs. Runescape and Angry Birds are different in a sense that the former game requires the acquisition of skill in the gameplay while the latter is easy to learn. As Runescape and Angry Birds were launched in 2001 and 2009 respectively, they provide further useful contrast in the evolution

of viral marketing and the diffusion of best practice over the decade. Overall, the longevity of Runescape provides it with an entrenched position across social media; the game's Design Director stated that over one thousand players' homemade videos were posted to YouTube and over 27,000 forum posts were written about Runescape 3 during the period of its launch in July 2013 (Jones, 2013).

RUNESCAPE

We will first briefly look at the founding of the firm behind Runescape – Jagex Games Studio. The co-founders of Jagex, the Gower brothers, were games enthusiasts who identified new market opportunities for online gaming. As teenagers, Andrew and Paul Gower created video games for Atari ST under Cunning & Devious Games and later Java Games on the Games Domain web site. They wrote and hosted the original version of Runescape in Andrew Gower's house, while he was an Undergraduate student at the University of Cambridge. They launched the browser-based free to play MMORPG in January 2001; however, players could choose to subscribe this MMORPG to obtain premium features that were not available on the free to play mode. Runescape was an instant success, and it has evolved into a global phenomenon through electronic word-of-mouth, as well as Jagex's viral marketing campaign (Saltzman, 2012). By 2013, it had over 220 million registered players in more than 150 countries (Jones 2013). Jagex has grown over the years and has developed other intellectual assets such as Carnage Racing and Transformers; it has also become the largest independent game firm in the UK, with nearly 500 employees by 2014. Andrew Gower left Jagex and set up a new venture to focus on a new programming language for gaming and the US Insight Venture Partners acquired 55% of the firm in 2012 (Burke 2012). Nevertheless, the vision of the Gower brothers, "love what you do" is entrenched in the culture of the firm.

Jagex Games Studio is a pioneer in viral marketing. Runescape provided a social media function in the early 2000s, before the founding of Facebook and Twitter and the widespread use of social media sites and Jagex's manager recalled that "hundreds of thousands of Runescape players would login every day just to chat and hang out with their friends" (Saltzman, 2012). Interestingly, highly offensive words would be filtered out in the chart forum and be replaced by the word "cabbage" since "the Gower brothers hated cabbages so much that they felt that they were just as bad as the word they were hiding" (ibid.). Indeed, the absence of obscene language remains a feature associated with the game.

As more players were involved in Runescape, some took the initiative to create a Runescape Wikipedia in April 2005; they explicitly stated that: "The RuneScape Wiki is in no way affiliated with Jagex". There were approximately 25,000 pages that could be assessed in 20 languages on the Runescape Wikipedia by April 2014. In other words, an average of some 3,000 pages has been created annually on the Wikipedia since its launch. Runescape Wikipedia is open to anyone who wants to provide information concerning the game, and it has official and unofficial links to the game event. Some committed members in the Runescape Wikipedia community also gathered together to organize online events. One can nominate himself or herself to join the Event Team (RfET) in the Runescape Wikipedia and the acceptance to the team depends on vacancy and the approval by existing members; criteria to join the team includes: familiarity with the game, being a trusted user, ability to

moderate chatroom and representation in public event.

Jagex appointed in 2008 Neil McClarty as the Marketing Director for Runescape, who then promoted the game further in social media sites such as Facebook and Twitters. Indeed Runescape has been on Twitters since November 2009, and has accumulated 32,700 tweets. It also has 78,700 followers on Twitters. For example, Jagex announced on 10 August 2014: "Remember @RuneFest tickets are now on sale! Who will we be seeing there?". RuneFest is an annual event organized by Jagex; this one day event allows the Runescape community to explore various features of the game such as graphic concepts during the day, and is followed by a party in the evening. There is also a forum to support players attending the event. Runescape players can purchase tickets for the RuneFest with debit/credit card or in-game currency.

Runescape has been marketed on Facebook effectively. Jagex Games Studio marketed Runescape 3 on Facebook during its launch on 5 December 2013 as: "RuneScape 3 is here! A new age dawns today, kicking off with the Battle of Lumbridge. Along with the hugely customisable New Interface System, the chance for fame in Seasonal Hiscores, over 6 hours of new live performed music and a range of technical improvements to enhance the player experience as if it was an entirely new game!" Runescape has also joined the more recently launched Google Plus. For example, Runescape provided the news concerning the update of the game on 4 August 2014 and attracted within a week on Google Plus over 16,000 people of the viewing of the patch notes and the related video.

Jagex involved YouTube extensively to maintain strong relationships with the Runescape community; trailers of Runescape 3, songs in Runescape, clips on Runefeast, behind the scene production of Runescape…etc. were posted on YouTube at the appropriate time to coincide with the promotion. There are also videos created by enthusiastic players to promote the game on YouTube, providing an electronic word-of-month effect as well as helping to attract new players to play the game for free. These videos range from in-game tutorials, commentary during game plays, game reviews, Jagex HQ visit as well as those produced videos for effects. Though comments could be made on YouTube, the interaction tends to be rather brief compared to other Runescape forums.

McClarty said that: "Social media gives your business a 'face' and it's important that you are as 'human' as possible, offering transparency, making every person within the community feel unique, and (probably most importantly) a bit of fun" (Keogh, 2014). This comment reiterated the viral marketing lessons that Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) highlighted in the preceding section. As Jagex publishes other online games such as War of Legends, its Digital Department formulates and implements overall social media marketing strategy, as well as overseeing media campaigns for existing games such as Runescape and new games such as Transformers. The duties of its Social Advertising Manager includes: optimisation and media budget management, direct response or awareness and engagement media campaign planning, monitoring of social advertising efforts and performance metrics and delivery of social advertising activity to a consistently high standard within cost effective parameters (Jagex, 2014). It can therefore be seen that the firm focused on quantifying the result of its social media spending while maintaining its relationship with the Runescape community.

Another recent feature of Runescape could be seen in Jagex's interaction with the stakeholders, addressing the rising sense of social responsibility among its youthful players. Runescape's in-game "Well of Goodwill", which was created in 2013, enabled players to donate in-game items or currencies to charitable causes. Jagex gave US$1 to every 10 million gold pieces denoted by the Runescape community to charities such as GamesAid, Willow, SpecialEffect, Action for Kids and the Internet Watch Foundation. Its Chief Operating Officer explained: "As a company, we regularly raise funds and donate thousands of pounds to charities each year. However, we have been keen to create an innovative way to involve our community for some time, and hopefully as a result, scale the effectiveness and reach of our charitable giving efforts" (GamesPolitics, 2013). Jagex further pushed the boundary and in 2014 attempted to educate younger players about the plight of illegal poaching of black and white rhinos within the game; it teamed up with the Royal Foundation and United for Wildlife to offer pet rhinos and rhino related items in Runescape (which could be obtained by answering questions related to rhino poaching by conservationists from Vietnam and Colombia).

Perhaps the most interesting question is why Runescape players spread the information in connection with the game. To understand this, we will need to first understand what Runescape really meant for the players. Crowe (2009, p.23) wrote about what happened in the game: "I noticed that there were characters who liked to fight and gain status and respect from their feats in a battle; there were entrepreneurs who exploited gaps in the virtual market space by selling scarce goods and resources; there were clans or friendship groups who seemed bound together by mutual support and inter-dependency; there were people looking for boy friends or girl friends and successful relationships that were sealed in wedding ceremonies; there were spiritual leaders; villains who could 'scam' new players – and take immense pride in their latest transgression; and heroes who saw their role as one of helping and assisting other helpers". Runescape in the eyes of players is therefore a virtual social system, which has its own norms and practices. Like any social system, members acquired and transmitted the norms and practices evolved in the system. The social network sites organized by various Runescape communities mentioned earlier enabled the dissemination of information and the storage of their collective intelligence that ultimately reinforced the continuity of the virtual system (Jenkins, 2002).

ANGRY BIRDS

Unlike Runescape's deep and rich gameplay, the Angry Birds franchise builds on the value proposition of an easy to play game with simple user interface. The game development studio Rovio Entertainment is behind the concept of Angry Birds that has successfully grown it into a global franchise encompassing television series, film, theme parks, books, beverages and toys. Rovio was established by the cousins Niklas and Mikeal Hed in Espoo, Finland in 2003; however, the firm was majority owned by Mikeal Hed's father Kaj (the internet entrepreneur) who invested €1 million in the firm through his Trema International Holdings B.V. Rovio had accumulated six years of experience in nearly fifty game projects before the launch of the global hit title Angry Birds on Apple Store in 2009. As in 2014, it had development studios in Finland and Sweden, an animation studio in Helsinki as well as marketing subsidiaries in London, Shanghai, California, Tokyo and Seoul. Rovio has expanded into a global firm with nearly 700 employees (Starr, 2014).

The development of Angry Birds was a planned strategy by Rovio in its attempt to create a valuable intellectual asset; its co-founders Niklas Hed recalled: "We thought we would need to do ten to 15 titles until we got the right one" (Cheshire, 2011). With Apple's iPhone users in mind, Rovio worked towards product ideas for a potential blockbuster game in early 2009. The firm also had five other criteria for the development – "the title had to be expandable to other platforms, but work as a pure iPhone game; it should be physics-based (popular on Flash websites at the time); there should be no tutorial; loading times should be minimal, so that you could play happily for just one minute; and it needed an icon which would stand out in the App store" (Cheshire, 2011). After the conceptualization of the high concept for Angry Birds, the development was completed in eight months and the game was officially launched in December 2009. Angry Birds sold 150,000 copies in its first week. With the initial welcoming reception by the public, the Angry Birds franchise expanded quickly and was succeeded by nine squeals as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: The Angry Birds Franchise

Titles	Year Launched	Developers
Angry Birds	2009	Rovio, Finland
Angry Birds Season	2010	Rovio, Finland
Angry Birds Rio	2011	Rovio, Finland
Angry Birds Space	2012	Rovio, Finland
Angry Birds Star Wars	2012	Exient Entertainment, UK
Angry Birds Friends	2012	Rovio, Finland
Angry Birds Star Wars II*	2013	Rovio, Finland and Lucas Arts, USA
Angry Birds Go	2013	Exient Entertainment, UK
Angry Birds Epic	2014	Chimera Entertainment, Germany
Angry Birds Transformers*	2014	Rovio, Finland and Hasbro Gaming, Japan

*These games represented Rovio's strategy to leverage the popularity of Star Wars and Transformers characters within its Angry Birds franchise. Hence, the Red Bird took on the personal of Luke Skywalker and Optimus Prime accordingly.

Source: Various.

Two of the games in the franchise shown in Table 1 were developed by the Oxford based firm Exient Entertainment while another was developed by Chimera in Germany; the remaining games in the franchise were developed by Rovio's internal team. There was considerable collaboration between Rovio and external firms during the development of Angry Birds Star Wars, Angry Birds Go and Angry Birds Epic. As Exient explained: "It was a very collaborative process, developing that title together. We have two producers from Rovio who work out of Exient's office, so it's very easy to collaborate on ideas and involve

them in the creative process… Their art director, Toni Kysenius, he would frequently come over and give us suggestions on what we were doing. They've got an amazing animation department" (Pearson, 2014).

Two years after its first launch, there were one billion downloads of different Angry Birds titles primarily as a result of new users attracted to the game through Rovio's viral marketing campaign (Kersey, 2012). The sales revenues of Rovio increased from €6.5 million in 2010 to €156 million in 2013 (Schultz, 2013). The success of Angry Birds can be seen in the social media traffic as in August 2014, i.e. Facebook registered 27.2 million "Likes", Google Plus registered 7.5 million followers and Twitters registered 629,000 followers. The cost effectiveness of social media can also be seen in the video sharing on YouTube, which consisted of Rovio's own videos and third party videos.

Table 2: Angry Birds on Youtube

Title of YouTube Video	Producer	Date first available	Number of viewers as on 18 August 2014
Angry Birds and the Mighty Eagle	Rovio	10/9/2010	106 million
Angry Birds Cinematic Trailer	Rovio	3/2/2010	102 million
Angry Birds Rio Trailer	Rovio	27/1/2011	97 million
Angry Birds Toy Surprise	Disney	11/5/2013	93 million
Angry Birds Space	Rovio	2/3/2012	66 million
Angry Birds Seasons Ham'o'ween	Rovio	20/10/2011	62 million
Angry Birds dance Gangnam Style	FunVideo TV	29/11/2012	49 million
Angry Birds Space Softee Dough	EvanTube HD	26/1/2013	48 million
Angry Birds Season's Greetings	Rovio	22/12/2010	45 million
Angry Orange vs Angry Birds	Angry Orange	7/10/2011	44 million

Source: www.YouTube.com

Table 2 shows the top video clips shared by viewers in YouTube; the duration of these widely viewed clips ranged from one minute to approximately six minutes. If we look at one of the games within the franchise, Angry Birds Go which was available in the Apple Store on 11 December 2013, we can trace Rovio Entertainmnet's viral marketing over the months from generating excitement and expectation for the new game on YouTube to the eventual release of the game. Rovio released the one minute video clip titled "What IS Angry Birds Go!?" to introduce the new Angry Birds game to the public on 27 August 2013. It then released "Angry Birds Go! Official Gameplay Trailer - Game out December 11!" in October "featuring high-octane downhill racing, upgradable karts, tons of characters with unique special powers and a fully rendered 3D world". This YouTube trailer has been

viewed over 11 million times and registered 23,594 "Likes" as on 20 August 2014. Prior to the launch, Rovio continued to reveal characters in the game across December 2013. It further posted the two minutes "Angry Birds Go! Cinematic Trailer" the day before the launch. Overall, the release of video clips in relation to Angry Birds Go represented Rovio Entertainment's typical attempts to catch the attention of YouTube viewers, who would then forward the content to their friends.

Indeed, its Vice President of Marketing and Communication stated that: "We have built our approach on a conversational marketing strategy together with our fans" (Reed 2013). Rovio would try to ignite the interest of Angry Birds players with a new franchise, and then allow the players to spread their enthusiasm to others. In their discussion of the experiential elements in the consumption of online games, Fleck et al. (2013 p. 304) wrote that players were motivated by "feelings of challenge, achievement, escapism and the experience of flow" as well as "a sense of connectedness". Angry Birds Go facilitated players to enjoy the individual experience and the collective social interaction, since players could compete with others on the Kart games online. Those enjoyed the game shared their experience online, and provided contagious marketing for Rovio, which is important since online trust has improved steadily in the past decade (Urban et al., 2009).

Although technology has contributed towards the success of Angry Birds, it has also become a curse. Angry Birds was unfortunately linked in early 2014 to the controversy and the scandal involving the former CIA staff Edward Snowden. It was exposed that players information were given to intelligent agencies, i.e. America's National Security Agency (NSA) and Britain's Government Communications Headquarter (GCHQ). Rovio stated that it did not have any involvement with NSA and GCHQ and it did not have "any previous knowledge of this matter, and have not been aware of such activity in 3rd party advertising networks" (The Guardian, 2014). This claim was substantiated by other leading reporters such as BBC "it appears that NSA/GCHQ are effectively piggybacking off customer data that companies designing software - whether Rovio or Google - collect themselves and without the companies knowing" (BBC, 2014). Having said that, we have to bear in mind the board trend of analysing customer database for marketing purpose has been widely accepted and consumer surveillance practices have been commonly in place within viral marketing since the 2010s.

Overall, Rovio's sales revenues increased by €4 million between 2012 and 2013. However its profits halved from €55.5m in 2012 to €26.9m in 2013, due to the substantial investment in new games, the Toons TV cartoons network, and the Angry Birds feature film. The success of the franchise in the future might rely more on consumer products such as toys, books and other licensed products where viral marketing may play a relatively less significant role.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted how digital media firms created competitive advantages through the use of viral marketing to maintain end user relationships as suggested by Negroponte (1995) and Bilton (2007). Like viruses, the brand messages of digital media products spread from existing users to potential ones. The information spreads on to other potential users to

rapidly establish virtual communities in various social media sites. Emotion is fundamental to viral marketing and the social sharing of emotions is the driving force for the building of virtual communities among end users. The message embedded in viral marketing campaign of concept-intensive online game discussed earlier was passed on to other players on the basis that players considered the games to be "fun, intriguing, or valuable" for others. There was a desire to share the emotions with those they know or they do not know (Lindgreen and Vanhamme 2005, p. 126). Recent research such as Berger and Milkman (2012) has explored emotions in the context of written communication, and highlighted the importance of positive content as well as content that arouses strong emotions towards effective viral marketing. The complexity of emotions might mean that future research could be in the domain of neuroscience where functional magnetic resonance imaging and others will be another technology driver for viral marketing (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2013).

It should be noted that overall digital media firms also target their potential users with increasingly sophisticated marketing that supports the brand messages; one of the way to achieve this was to work alongside the game developers early in the project as in the case of Angry Birds (Reed, 2013). Close collaboration along the value chain is therefore important for viral marketers.

Table 3: The New Face of Marketing

Product Led (Pre-1980s)	Customer Led (1980s and 1990s)	Experience Led (Current)
Promotion and Sales	Strategy and Segmentation	Personal Relationships
Bring in the maximum number of users	Identify specific needs and wants and provide products to meet those needs	Facilitate creative consumption by providing symbolic resources

Source: Based on Bilton (2007, p.144)

Within the current experience led stage of marketing development, viral marketing accelerates the interaction between digital media marketers and users as well as among the user groups. However, viral marketing not only touches on digital media, it has also spread to high tech consumption where the marketing campaigns provide emotional sparks and generate connections among users. A good example is YouTube has enabled iconic high tech products such as Apple iPhone's advertisements to go viral in the past years; some of these videos have attracted millions of viewers. What is the future of marketing then? As the younger generation is integrated with digital technology and social media, the predominance of viral marketing will be inevitable. Hence, it is critical for firms to understand the process of social contagion and tailor made seeding strategy that target well connected users.

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