

Linking Viral Marketing to Brand Awareness: The Case of Red Bull

Qinyao Zhang *

Faculty of Business, Economics and Law, School of Business, The University of Queensland,
4072, Australia

* Corresponding Author Email: s4741355@uq.edu.au

Abstract. Viral marketing deeply reveals the mechanism by which information spreads naturally in social networks. Through viral marketing, brands are able to achieve better results in terms of brand awareness compared to traditional marketing methods. This paper examines and analyzes how Red Bull used viral marketing strategy to increase its brand awareness in the global market. The study demonstrates the importance of this strategy in an era of globalization of markets and digitalization of information. Using the Red Bull marketing case as a backdrop, the article examines Red Bull's marketing activities and performance based on a case study approach and analyzes the reasons for its success in conjunction with data. The results of the study show that Red Bull has succeeded in expanding brand awareness globally and increasing consumer loyalty through the creation and sponsorship of extreme sports and compelling cultural events, as well as the effective use of social media platforms to enhance consumer interaction and connectivity. The conclusion of the study emphasizes the effectiveness and importance of viral marketing in modern branding strategies by analyzing Red Bull's marketing strategies.

Keywords: Viral marketing, Brand awareness, Red Bull.

1. Introduction

Brand awareness is one of the key indicators to measure the market performance of a brand, and viral marketing is known as an important strategy to increase brand awareness due to its low-cost and efficient dissemination characteristics. Especially in the current era of highly developed Internet, how to make the brand information in the social network to achieve a wide range of dissemination will be a major pain point in marketing to improve brand awareness.

Through viral marketing, brands are able to achieve better results in terms of brand awareness compared to traditional marketing methods. In the current context of brand globalization, faced with cultural differences and diversity, it is very important to understand how the sharing, discussion and interaction generated by viral marketing on social media can effectively transform brand awareness and ensure its durability. This study will take Red Bull as an example and analyze its representative marketing programs to explain the significance and insights of the connection between viral marketing and brand awareness.

Viral marketing deeply reveals the mechanism by which information spreads naturally in social networks. Utilizing this mechanism to plan a viral marketing program for a brand will achieve the important purpose of increasing brand awareness and spreading brand information in today's Internet era.

2. Literature Review

With the increasing competition among major companies on social media, how marketers can increase brand awareness through viral marketing strategies has become a key research topic. Viral marketing is a low-cost and fast-spreading marketing tool that aims to transform audiences from passive viewers to active communicators, thus crossing the barrier of traditional advertising, expanding brand awareness and attracting public attention.

The effectiveness of viral marketing is often assessed by measuring the amount of interaction between brands and users on social media platforms. Red Bull is seen as an example of a company

that has successfully utilized viral marketing, with its content performing particularly well on social media. According to NewsWhip in 2015, Red Bull had over 600,000 interactions with its content in a given month [1]. In addition, Red Bull's "The Stratosphere Project" received more than 8 million views on YouTube within a day of its launch, demonstrating the potential of viral marketing to expand a brand's reach.

However, while viral marketing excels in terms of speed and impact, the uncontrollable nature of its distribution also poses potential risks. Although viral content is carefully planned, audiences from different cultural backgrounds may interpret the content differently, and such cultural differences may lead to misinterpretation of the brand message. Lind and Morup point out that Red Bull often plans its marketing campaigns around extreme sports, a high-risk type of sport, and such videos usually receive the highest engagement on social media due to their excitement and thrill, and significantly increase brand awareness [2]. However, consumers' drivers for online interactions are often based on their personal understanding of the campaign, and thus, when the authenticity of the campaign is questioned or triggers a negative experience, it may lead to an escalation of negative comments, which can deviate from the initial marketing intent and even damage brand awareness.

To summarize, existing studies have generally explored the effectiveness of viral marketing in enhancing brand awareness, the speed of dissemination, and its risks; however, these studies have mostly focused on the breadth of dissemination, while ignoring the depth and persistence of dissemination. How to overcome the lack of brand awareness persistence in viral marketing remains an important topic for further exploration.

3. Red Bull's Viral Marketing Strategy

Red Bull is an Austria-based multinational company known for the production and distribution of functional beverages. Since Red Bull was first launched in Austria in 1987, the product has quickly expanded to the global market and is now sold in more than 170 countries and territories. At the same time, the company is using direct and indirect marketing strategies to expand its market share.

Red Bull has succeeded in creating a young, energetic and adventurous brand image through a very unique brand positioning that associates the product's ability to raise spirits and provide energy with cultural activities such as extreme sports, music festivals and e-sports.

In a highly competitive market, Red Bull has benefited from a unique marketing strategy and extensive sponsorships that have made the classic silver, white and blue bottle and logo instantly recognizable. This high level of brand recognition, combined with the company's innovative marketing strategy of not sticking to traditional advertising, has greatly increased the brand's visibility and appeal. All of this anchors a unique consumer base, especially young people and those who love sports. This is why its products can quickly enter new markets and sustain sales.

Viral marketing for Red Bull is a central part of its overall marketing strategy, with the company achieving widespread distribution on social media through a series of high-impact and innovative campaigns. As a result, Red Bull generally employs a strategy of designing highly innovative and contagious content to ensure that it resonates with the brand's image and target market. The content is entertaining, informative or compelling. The content is then promoted simultaneously across all major social media outlets and optimized using algorithmic optimization of social media tools to increase the additivity of the content and optimize the campaign based on the platform's response data analysis, such as number of views, analytics, comments and likes, to ensure that the campaign continues to be carried out in a timely manner.

In 2012, Red Bull's Stratosphere Program sponsored extreme athlete Felix Baumgartner's stratospheric skydive, which broke several world records. The event was viewed millions of times on YouTube and shared and discussed on social media. The Red Bull Flugtag is an event that has participants designing and building their own unpowered flying machines and flying them out from a platform as far as possible. This event, held annually in a different part of the world, combines

creativity, humor and a sense of adventure and attracts a large media and audience, further reinforcing Red Bull's brand positioning.

Red Bull's strategy for utilizing a viral marketing program centers on creating content that inspires audience engagement and sharing. It also builds unique marketing campaigns that enhance consumer engagement.

Red Bull does this by creating engaging content on topics such as extreme sports, cultural events and adventure experiences. This engaging content is also easy to share on social media, which naturally contributes to viral distribution and increased awareness [2]. Red Bull used strategic posting to distribute this content on social media, as well as polling and posting interactive topics based on live streaming to increase audience engagement. The diverse interaction strategies also tend to make the audience feel like they are always interacting with the brand. To keep the content cutting edge and hot, Red Bull is also adept at synchronizing its campaigns with current cultural trends and major events. By linking with pop culture, major sporting events such as the Ultra Music Festival and Formula 1 races. By appealing to specific audience segments, Red Bull is able to increase its relevance in these areas and raise brand awareness across borders. Red Bull also optimizes its viral marketing strategy by continuously monitoring the performance of its social media campaigns. The analysis of data helps the brand to have a better understanding of the audience's preferences and current trends, so that the brand can continuously adjust and launch content that stimulates the audience's interest and participation, thus maximizing the effectiveness of the promotional strategy.

In summary, by creating engaging content, effectively leveraging social media to engage with users and audience groups, and keeping up with cultural trends while using data as a driver to continually optimize content and strategy, Red Bull has succeeded in increasing audience interaction, brand engagement and awareness.

4. The Two-Way Relationship between Viral Marketing and Brand Awareness Enhancement

4.1. Evaluation of the Communication Effect of Viral Marketing

Evaluating the effectiveness of a Red Bull viral marketing campaign and its relevance to brand awareness can be done through quantitative results such as the number of likes and comments on a video or topic, as well as product sales and market feedback.

Red Bull spends 30-35% of its sales on marketing each year, with the Red Bull Formula 1 team alone spending over \$200 million per year [3]. The "Stratosphere Project" on YouTube cost more than £100 million [4]. However, this has resulted in a cumulative sales growth of 17.04% in 11 years. With this relentlessly genius marketing strategy, Red Bull had a record 57.6% of the functional beverage market share [5]. It had dominated the industry with more than 40% market share despite the slowdown in functional beverage growth rate to 5.2% from 2010-2015 [5].

The "Flat Flow Program" was viewed more than 8 million times on social media platforms such as Youtube, and half of the world's top tweets were related to the "Stratosphere Program" [6]. Following the campaign, sales of Red Bull soared by 6% in 6 months [7]. According to an article by Cision Canada, the most successful and commercially viable news stories are when the performance is aligned with the brand's values [8]. After all, there is nothing more eye-catching and in line with the product positioning than a man wearing the Red Bull logo jumping off the edge of space and reaching supersonic speeds by gravitational acceleration alone. In addition, Red Bull made the flight data available to the public and donated the jump suit and capsule to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, enhancing brand awareness across borders while perfectly fulfilling its corporate social responsibility [9,10].

The increase in sales shows that Red Bull's marketing strategy has been very successful. For Red Bull, in addition to sales, the goal is to increase brand awareness, which is reflected in the high ratings and popularity of the Stratosphere Project. Red Bull's F1 team has continued to expand its brand presence each year with impressive results and the iconic Red Bull logo on its cars.

4.2. Cultural Differences and Content Adaptation

As a multinational company, Red Bull's entry into the Asian market was inevitable given the near saturation of the energy drink market in Europe and the United States. However, when Red Bull adopted "Red Bull gives you wings" as its slogan, and infused this spirit of adventure into the brand by organizing extreme sports events and sponsoring extreme athletes, it may not be suitable for all cultures.

Red Bull has made extensive use of extreme sports as a centerpiece of its viral marketing. However, the lower acceptance of risk in Asian cultures may result in the target market not resonating with this type of content as much as Western societies [11].

The language of the viral content needs to be highly localized, adapting and integrating the meanings intended to be conveyed in the advertisement or campaign to the local cultural context and making the message more relevant to the local audience. Sensitivities need to be considered when entering countries where certain cultures are symbolic. Otherwise, the adaptability of the content to the audience will be reduced. In the case of Red Bull's purchase of the German team Leipzig, for example, there is a strong tradition of club ownership in Germany, particularly the "50+1" rule. This rule requires that at least a portion of a club's shares be controlled by fans to prevent the team from being over-commercialized. Red Bull broke this rule by taking advantage of a legal loophole to take de facto control of the club in terms of management and control, which led to RB Leipzig being perceived as a "plastic club" (i.e., a club that is entirely driven by commercial interests) [12]. This has led to a departure from the German soccer culture and has caused widespread fan discontent [12].

4.3. Risks and Challenges of Viral Marketing

4.3.1. Risk analysis

Once viral content is released, it is difficult to control how it spreads. In the case of Red Bull's Project Stratosphere, the stakes were high when Red Bull chose to broadcast such a dangerous event live on YouTube to millions of people around the world. When the skydiver Baumgartner jumped off the edge of space and started spinning out of control, no one could guarantee that it would not be a live broadcast of death, and even with nearly seven years of preparation, there was no way that the chances of failure would be zero [13]. On the other hand, there is the negative public opinion, the high attention of a viral marketing campaign can create a major crisis that is difficult to control due to its negative comments, which can have a significant impact on brand awareness and reputation. Allison, a public relations practitioner, even directly stated that he might have hesitated to accept the project even before it started [8].

4.3.2. Avoidance strategies

Content is thoroughly vetted prior to publication through content pre-screening and testing, including legal review and cultural sensitivity testing. At the same time, organizations can evaluate the reactions of different cultures and groups to the content through focus groups or market tests to ensure that the information is accurate. In addition, establish monitoring and emergency response mechanisms to monitor the spread of viral content and public reactions. When the campaign is released, if the organization discovers any negative impact, it should take countermeasures, such as taking down the content or launching a crisis communication campaign.

Finally, the company can strengthen the overall cultural sensitivity training of the marketing department, so that the department can introduce a diverse background when planning viral content, respecting the characteristics and taboos of different cultures in order to enhance global adaptability. Therefore in order to avoid another public outcry caused by the acquisition of the Leipzig team (RB Leipzig).

5. Social Media Based Viral Marketing Model

5.1. Viral Marketing Success Factor Model

Modeling the success factors of viral marketing, especially on social media platforms, involves multiple factors that all work together to determine the success of viral marketing. Building a model of viral marketing success based on the strategies used in the Red Bull case can provide insight into how strategies work together and how they can be replicated in other contexts. According to Wilson, there are six key principles to follow when conducting viral marketing, of which the multiplicity and scarcity of elements are the key factors in constructing a good viral marketing campaign.

The first step in a viral marketing strategy is to provide valuable content, such as through the creation of educational and entertaining content. For example, Red Bull both inspired and motivated its audience through content related to extreme sports and cultural events. The data of that jump by Baumgartner is also providing knowledge to the world and the brand is objectively promoting humanity [8]. This kind of meaningful and original content that fulfills the gimmick while matching the audience's interests is especially important in social media and directly affects the spread of the content. Secondly ensure that content formats (videos, articles, images) are shared with as little restriction as possible to technology-based accessibility. Provide easy-to-share features that display obvious share buttons or channels for engagement to minimize the impact on user sharing as well as engagement. Leverage common motivators in content that easily resonate emotionally, such as humor, passion, surprise and a sense of adventure or belonging. One of the research approaches by Teixeira or Dobele et al. found that viral videos containing activities with emotions related to sports or dangerous situations were the most popular [14,15]. This kind of content and activities that touch users' intrinsic motivation are easy to spread. Furthermore, through existing social media platforms and influencers, for example Red Bull chose to use Youtube to partner with extreme sports or events like F1. Influential partners have a certain fan base and the activity of their fans is crucial for the breadth and depth of the brand message.

Utilizing a sense of lack of resources in these points is important. By creating exclusive events or limited time content, audiences are prompted to take action before they miss out. An example of this would be Red Bull's Red Bull Flugtag Unpowered Flight Race, an event that is available and only available from Red Bull. This kind of unique event or content is something that can significantly increase user engagement and urgency and increase the viral content of the content.

Lastly, continuous follow-up on programs and content, by updating content and campaigns on a regular basis, as well as creating campaigns based on audience response. This kind of continuous audience engagement and quality customer service is essential to deepen brand loyalty and increase brand awareness. It helps to overcome the shortcomings of the lack of depth of viral marketing.

5.2. Interaction Model of Brand Awareness and Viral Marketing

The interaction between brand awareness and viral marketing is a complex process. The diffusion of brand awareness is an important mechanism by which viral marketing can enhance brand image and market position. At the same time, brand awareness also enhances the effectiveness of viral marketing campaigns, as consumers may be more willing to share and participate in a brand they love and know.

This interactive feedback loop allows the use of compelling content when employing viral marketing to inspire empathy with the audience. The content is driven to spread quickly among users, and this extremely fast spread in turn allows the brand to rapidly increase its visibility. At the same time, as brand awareness increases, the brand's credibility, brand image and brand authority in the marketplace are rapidly enhanced. This allows its brand's subsequent marketing activities to be more easily accepted and spread by the public, and is a positive cycle for the overall marketing to realize.

If a brand has successful viral marketing its can be considered part of the brand equity, these activities can enhance sales and awareness in the short term, and in the long term will help to enhance the emotional link of consumers to the brand and enhance brand loyalty.

For brands, viral marketing strategies can help brands adapt and bring promotional value in different market environments. In mature markets, engaging content and novel themes in viral marketing can help reduce audience fatigue with the original advertising and marketing strategies. This reinvigorating approach helps brands break through the information overload barrier. For emerging or developing markets, viral marketing can quickly build brand awareness and market share in a cost-effective manner [16].

The only thing that has an impact on these strategies is the level of technological access in the market (internet penetration and social media usage). This will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of viral marketing, with more digitized societies being more likely to be successful with viral marketing. On the other hand, markets with lower levels of technological access will need to consider combining it with traditional media to achieve the best communication results.

By understanding and applying the interaction between brand awareness and viral marketing in this way, brands are better able to make locally tailored strategic decisions when implementing viral marketing campaigns, lowering resistance in brand globalization and further deepening in-depth market development.

5.3. Long-term Effects of Viral Marketing and Brand Management

Viral marketing needs to be strategically considered and executed in the face of long-term effects and ongoing brand management. Based on the framework provided by Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), viral marketing rapidly increases brand visibility while ensuring that this short-term high attention does not deviate from the brand's core values and long-term goals. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the brand's long-term goals and core values are met before using viral marketing.

Under this positioning, viral content needs to be interesting, engaging and widely shared, but it also needs to accurately communicate and reinforce the core values of the brand to consumers and audiences. For example, Red Bull is associated with adventure and energy.

At the same time, integrated marketing communications emphasizes the importance of communicating a consistent message across multiple channels and tools. Therefore, when planning viral marketing content, it is important to consider the consistency of the content of the campaign across multiple social media outlets, whether using video, images or text. Based on the above analysis, combined with the characteristics of different platforms, such as designing media for rapid dissemination, while e-mail, WeChat, blogs, can be used to deepen information and strengthen education.

Finally, through a comprehensive testing and evaluation system, brands continuously adjust strategies to analyze audience and market reactions, ensuring that viral marketing campaigns can not only increase short-term attention but also increase long-term brand value. In addition, based on the last popular part of the viral content or campaign, continue to provide relevant content to the audience, or even start an online community or an offline campaign.

Based on the above analysis, the brand utilized integrated marketing communications theory to guide the viral marketing strategy, ensuring that the viral content would impact the market in a timely manner while also supporting and enhancing the brand's long-term strategic goals.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzes the case of Red Bull's use of viral marketing and finds that it is a powerful tool that can significantly increase brand awareness and reveals the importance of viral marketing in modern brand development strategies. The results show that by creating valuable content and activities, utilizing scarcity of resources and social media interactions, Red Bull not only increased brand awareness but also deepened brand loyalty and engagement among its audience. This strategy demonstrates the power of communication in the marketplace and how user-generated content on social media platforms enhances brand value.

The significance of this study is to analyze and emphasize the important strategic role of viral marketing strategy for the competition and deepening of the value of companies and brands in the modern market development. In the context of the digital era, the effective use of viral marketing strategies by enterprises helps them to expand market share and enhance brand influence in the short term. In the long run this effective way of interacting with consumers makes it easier to build emotional links with audience groups and strengthen brand loyalty.

However, there are some objective limitations to this study. First, the case study is limited to one company, Red Bull, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. There may be bias in the application and effectiveness of the strategy across different industries and firms. Secondly, the study mainly relies on public data and lacks the direct decision-making content of Red Bull in applying the strategy. This may have an impact on the depth and precision of the study.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the analysis of multiple cases from different companies in different industries to enhance the applicability and generalizability of the findings. As well, refining the applicability of viral marketing in diverse cultural contexts and studying the impact of cultural differences will be the focus of future research.

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