



Journal of Promotional Communications

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information: <http://promotionalcommunications.org/index.php/pc/about/submissions>

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To cite this article: Moore, S. 2015. Film Talk: An investigation into the use of viral videos in film marketing, and the impact on electric word of mouth during pre-release and opening week, *Journal of Promotional Communications*, 3 (3), 380-404.

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Sophie Moore

Film Talk: An investigation into the use of viral videos in film marketing, and the impact on electronic word of mouth during pre-release and opening week

This research paper focuses on the use of viral videos in film marketing and the impact on electronic word of mouth. As cinema admissions rapidly decrease, there is a growing importance for marketers to find unique and innovative ways to attract audiences to a film. Viral marketing is one way in which marketers create buzz around a film prior to release. Previous academic literature has studied the positive impact of viral marketing on a film's electronic word of mouth, however research into the recent influx of viral videos used for film promotion remains scarce. Research adopts an explanatory sequential mixed method design, in which quantitative data is used to analyse the impact of viral videos on the volume of electronic word of mouth, and qualitative data provides further explanation as to why electronic word of mouth has been impacted. The study found that the sample of viral videos successfully initiated electronic word of mouth, represented by a large volume of Tweets referencing both the videos and the promoted films. The results demonstrated that the use of originality, humour and emotion within the content prompted online conversation expressing the viewer's enjoyment. Consequently the increase in online conversation and the prominent branding within the videos' content positively impacted audience awareness towards the promoted films. The paper concludes with professional recommendations as to the future use of viral videos in film marketing.

Keywords: Viral Videos, Viral Marketing, Film Marketing



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INTRODUCTION

“In contrast to just about every other product release, a movie faces a singular challenge: it must create near-instant national brand-name recognition within a span of a few days to a couple of weeks” (Gerbrandt 2010).

Throughout the history of cinema, film marketing has used a variety of tools including posters and theatrical trailers to achieve audience recognition and product differentiation. Film marketing is any activity that assists a film in reaching its target audience at any time throughout its life (Pham and Watson 1993). The rapidly advancing marketing landscape has transformed with the creation of the Internet, a new media platform for films to be marketed, distributed and viewed. From a negative perspective, the evolution of the Internet has challenged the film industry to combat DVD and Internet piracy as well as retain cinema goers that are presented with a greater choice of less traditional entertainment (Wray 2003). Box office takings suffered a 2.9% drop in 2014, which has been attributed to the cost of cinema tickets increasing and a growing trend to stream videos at home through content hubs such as Netflix (Strauss 2013; Furness 2015). In particular, cinema attendance among the younger digital audience dropped by 15% (Spangler 2014). Consequently there is a growing importance for marketers to find innovative and unique ways to entice audiences to the cinema, in particular using digital marketing tools to attract a rapidly decreasing demographic (Mohr 2007; Jeffrey 2014).

Viral marketing is one such promotional posture that captures people's attention and drives audiences to cinemas. Viral marketing is the process of encouraging audiences to pass along a favourable or compelling marketing message that they receive in a hypermedia environment (Hausmann 2012). Previous viral campaigns have used elaborate websites, blogs, interactive games, and videos to build awareness prior to a film's release. There is also a growing sub-culture of film fans for which the hunt for this additional film material is as exciting as the films themselves (McMahon 2010). Consequently, the use of viral marketing in film promotion is now as important as conventional practices (Kerrigan 2010).

At the core of viral marketing is audience participation in online conversation, also known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Online conversation about films can build anticipation and buzz around new releases. According to research, eWOM on Twitter contributes to 13% of UK cinema ticket sales (Moosman 2015), reinforcing the important role eWOM has on a film's box office success.

Videos that have diffused through eWOM are the most regularly used method of viral marketing (Haque et al. 2006; Nelson-Field et al. 2013). The age of technological mobility is driving an increase in video consumption as the recent proliferation of new devices allows the audience to connect with content, anytime and anywhere (Nielsen 2014). Marketers are therefore creating videos for the sole purpose of film promotion and Hollywood is leading the way when it comes to the production of viral videos that get shared by millions of viewers (Goldsmith 2011). Research found that viewers who enjoyed a video demonstrated 139% higher brand association and 97% higher purchase intention than those who did not enjoy it (McNeal 2012). Thus, viral videos that entertain the audience can positively impact viewers' awareness and attitude towards a film.

Viral videos typically have smart distribution and optimisation strategies in order to reach a large number of people (Goldsmith 2011), yet research on how marketers can optimise video content for sharing remains scarce. In addition, there is little evidence to show the direct impact of viral videos on film-related eWOM. This paper seeks to contribute to a gap in current knowledge by exploring the impact of viral videos on eWOM and also how videos can be optimised to encourage sharing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will critically evaluate and review existing literature, providing a theoretical explanation of viral marketing and contextualising its use within the film industry. In addition, the growing importance of eWOM and the increasing use of viral videos will be evaluated.

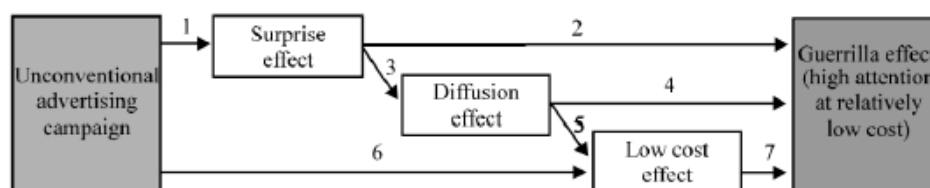
Guerrilla Marketing

The guerrilla marketing concept, first coined by Levinson (1998), revolutionised marketing strategies by exploring unconventional ways of performing activities on a minimal budget. Canan et al. (2010) suggests guerrilla marketing is “a tool that allows SME’s to demoralize their rivals with small, periodical surprising attacks” (p.281). However, over the past decade the concept has developed from a competitor orientated approach to a customer orientated approach (Solomon et al. 2009). Furthermore, the changing economic climate has resulted in a number of larger companies exploiting guerrilla instruments to obtain maximum results from smaller marketing budgets, representing its unprecedented importance for companies of all sizes (Bigat 2012).

Reflecting these recent developments, this paper defines guerrilla marketing as an umbrella term, used for unconventional campaigns that draw the attention of a large audience to a marketing message (Hutter and Hoffmann 2011). Academic literature acknowledges the challenges of defining what constitutes an unconventional campaign as it is related to people’s perceptions and the frequency of use (Jurca 2010). As a result, film marketers present content in an unforgettable and unique way in order to be perceived as new. A case study approach used by Prevot (2009) found that originality and creativity heightened the likelihood of audiences perceiving a campaign as unconventional.

Marketers have developed a variety of instruments that can be categorised under guerrilla marketing, such as ambient marketing, ambush marketing, experiential marketing and viral or buzz marketing (Schmitt 1999; Carter 2003; Notarantonio and Quigley 2009; Hutter 2015). Hutter and Hoffman (2011) suggest that these instruments consist of three main effects; a surprise effect, a diffusion effect and a low-cost effect. Each effect contributes to a highly efficient campaign in terms of the ratio of costs to benefits, as shown in Figure 1.0 and explored further later in the paper.

Figure 1.0: The Basic Guerrilla Effect



Source: Hutter and Hoffmann (2011, p42)

On the other hand, critics have raised a number of ethical concerns arising from the surprise effect prevalent in guerrilla instruments such as ambush and stealth marketing. Kaikati and Kaikati (2004) describe these instruments as manipulative and intrusive to the audience. For example, in 2007 the guerrilla marketing campaign for *Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film for Theaters* (2007) caused a bomb scare in the streets of Boston (Zuo and Veil 2006). The campaign's surprise effect was implemented by placing magnetic light versions of the film's cartoon characters in unusual locations around Boston; however passers-by misinterpreted the light box as a bomb. This example demonstrates the vulnerability of audiences towards guerrilla instruments and how implementations that are prepared and executed without certain boundaries may lead to ethical problems (Canan et al. 2010).

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing, also known as buzz marketing, is an instrument that explicitly aims to encourage the diffusion effect (Hutter and Hoffmann 2011). Like a virus, the tactic uses rapid multiplication to send the marketing message to a wide audience, relying on a high pass along rate to create a snowballing effect (Mohr 2007). Rollins et al. (2014) demonstrated how the marketing message generates film buzz by entertaining the consumer, with the most successful viral marketing campaigns focusing on humour and interactivity.

Film companies are using viral marketing due to a number of aspects that make it an attractive promotional posture in driving audiences to the cinema (Mohr 2007). Reflecting guerrilla marketing characteristics, Rosen (2000) proposes that the low cost of a viral campaign is a significant determinant as audiences disseminate the message. This view advocates that viral marketing involves low levels of financial risk, supporting its earlier favourability by small and medium enterprises (SME's) over traditional marketing methods (Canan et al. 2010). Viral marketing also targets potentially interested viewers by initiating conversation through viral content, generating buzz and resulting in greater consumer awareness for the film (Karniouchina 2011). Finally, viral messages add credibility through WOM, an important aspect as 53% of film audiences base their film decisions on information received from others (Rosen 2000).

A widely cited first example of viral marketing in the film industry is *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), in which its box office success has been attributed to a high level of WOM (Harris 2001; McDowell 2001; Liu 2006; Mohr 2007). As part of an underground movement, the low-budgeted independent film used viral marketing to create buzz through a website (McDowell 2001). Harris (2001) describes how the website content included fictional items such as police reports and interviews with the 'missing'

filmmakers' parents that caused audience speculation and positioned the film as "an unsolved mystery" (p.78). Subsequently the film received a large amount of word of mouth before and after the film's release.

Word of Mouth

At the core of viral marketing is audience participation through word of mouth (WOM). WOM is the process of conveying information from person to person (Jansen et al. 2009). Unpredictable in nature, viral marketing relies on the reception and interpretation of the message by consumers as well as meeting the viewer's sharing threshold (Phelps et al. 2004). Liu (2006) describes the primary function of WOM within the film industry as through an informative effect on awareness. This is parallel with a social psychology study by Zajonc (1968) on the mere-exposure effect that found audiences have a favourable attitude towards things they are familiar with.

Marketing literature has widely described the process of word of mouth in correlation with the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers 1962; Heitzler et al. 2008; Kerrigan 2010). Parallel to the unconventional aspect of a viral campaign, an innovation must also be perceived as new in order to diffuse amongst members of a social system (Hollensen 2007). Rogers (1962) suggests that mass media channels are used for learning about innovation, whereas interpersonal communication is important for persuasion. Consequently, WOM is perceived as more credible and trustworthy (Brown et al. 2007), and therefore more likely to influence audiences film decisions.

Data analysis remains the most popular method to study film related WOM, with previous research focusing on film reviews following a film's release (Liu 2006; Moul 2007; Duan et al. 2008; Kim et al. 2013). WOM data can be conceptually divided into volume and valence. Volume measures the total amount of WOM interactions, whereas valence captures the nature of WOM messages (Liu 2006). Research has shown a strong correlation between WOM volume and box office revenue whereas valence has no direct impact (Liu 2006; Duan et al. 2008). This supports the premise that WOM around a film functions primarily through an increased awareness (Liu 2006). Roschk and Große's (2013) findings support that WOM volume is a major predictor of theatrical box office revenue, however results also show that WOM volume after the first week appears to be unrelated to long-term revenues. One explanation may be that WOM reaches its maximum peak early in a film's life cycle, after which further WOM has little effect on awareness. As a result, significant word of mouth occurs during the pre-release period and opening week (Mohr 2007) and is not restricted to audiences who have seen a film, as suggested by Roschk and Große (2013).

Electronic Word of Mouth

WOM has typically been considered as spoken face-to-face communication (Rogers 1962). However, digital advancements enabling computer-mediated communication have led to the term electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Electronic word of mouth or word of mouse (Breazeale 2009), can be defined as interpersonal communication within a variety of online environments, allowing information exchanges to be immediately available to a multitude of people (Kim et al. 2014). It could be argued that previous research into WOM has used both terms interchangeably leading to misinterpretation. For example, Liu's (2006) study into the impact of WOM on box office analysed online film reviews, and therefore the research is based on the electronic form of word of mouth as opposed to face-to-face communication. This study provides a clear distinction

between WOM as face-to-face communication and eWOM as computer-mediated communication, with research focusing solely on eWOM.

Primary factors influencing audience participation in eWOM behaviour were found to be the consumers' need for social interaction and the prospect of enhancing one's own self-worth (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). For example, consumers may perceive a greater social benefit for talking about a popular subject (i.e. film) than talking about a less popular one. Previous research by Bansal (2000) supported these findings in relation to social network theory, by emphasising the audiences' desire to maintain relationships that link members to a social system.

Electronic word of mouth can take place in a variety of ways such as consumer reviews, opinions forums and discussion boards. Enabled by the rise of the Internet, eWOM also allows consumers to share a message across social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Hausmann 2012). SNSs can convey marketing messages to millions of users and combined with their ability to diffuse information in real time, they are a valuable tool in the viral marketing mix for content distribution (Kim et al. 2014).

Viral Videos

Video clips that have diffused through eWOM are the most regularly used method of viral marketing (Haque et al. 2006; Nelson-Field et al. 2013). In order to measure the success of a viral video, Mohr (2014) calculated that virality is based on the number of views a video received. However, McNeal (2012) previously emphasised the dangers associated with analysing the number of views due to seeding tactics. Seeding tactics can be used to disseminate a video in popular online portals, to increase viewing figures; whereas the volume of shares represents the number of times the content has been voluntarily passed along, and therefore accurately reflects a video's virality. Reflecting the low cost effect of guerrilla marketing, Rollins et al. (2014) suggests the production costs for the creation of a video are significantly lower than traditional marketing expenditure, such as a theatrical trailer. This paper differentiates viral videos from theatrical trailers; defining viral videos as original content solely created for sharing and theatrical trailers as videos comprised of clips from a feature length film.

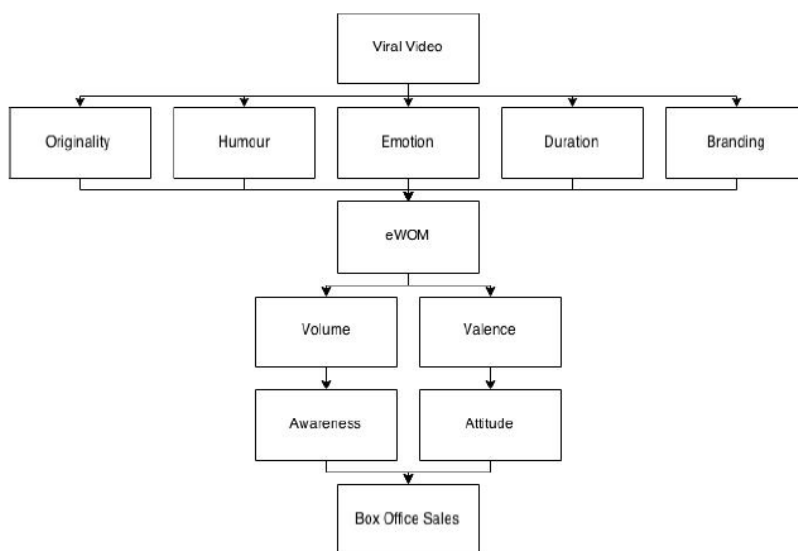
To understand the development from theatrical trailers to viral videos one must reflect on historic cinematic marketing. As early as the 1910s, marketing strategies were using theatrical trailers to provide potential audiences with a taste of the film (Johnston 2009). Techniques used in these earlier periods of cinema history can be found in contemporary viral marketing campaigns. For example, in the classical era, trailers were dominantly used to promote upcoming films; however after the introduction of the television, persuasive trailers were used to sway audiences away from the new entertainment medium. Similarly, viral marketing uses viral videos as an online tool to lure audiences to the cinema. A popular marketing campaign demonstrating persuasive techniques before the digital age is Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). In the six-minute *Psycho* trailer, Hitchcock personally guides the audience on a tour of the film's eerily deserted sets. Gilbey (2006) describes the trailer as "a work of seduction and suspense" that entices the audience to the cinema (p.43). This persuasive and unconventional approach to film marketing validates how viral marketing campaigns are part of broader, historical and industrial modes of engagement.

In order to heighten engagement with a film in the modern day, techniques are used within video content to encourage the transformation of the passive spectator into an active user (Dafonte-Gómez 2014). Research shows that emotions generated by different videos play an important role in why messages go viral (Dobele et al. 2007;

Botha and Reyneke 2013). Russell’s (1980) circumplex model of affect scales emotions on two aspects; arousal and pleasure. High arousal emotions, such as excitement, surprise or alarm, encourage viewers to share messages with others (Berger 2013). Dafonte-Gómez (2014) found surprise and happiness as the two most prominent high arousal emotions within a sample of top viral videos which in turn encouraged sharing, concurring with research by Eckler and Bolls (2011). In addition, a study by Chen and Lee (2014) showed the universal appeal of humour as a critical factor that influences the sharing of content. Thus, emotional contagion is a key determinant of viral videos (Botha and Reyneke 2013).

Research also suggests sharing intentions can be impacted by the duration of a video and its level of branding. Studying the relationship between video duration and arousal, McNeal (2012) found that clips approximately three minutes long were more likely to result in high arousal emotions compared to shorter segments. In addition, Hsieh et al. (2012) found favourableness and forwarding intention significantly decreased when the video included prominent brand information. Figure 2.0 presents a conceptual framework that integrates the impact of viral videos on eWOM and subsequent box office sales.

Figure 2.0: A Conceptual Framework of Viral Videos



This literature review has provided an understanding of the multifaceted definitions of guerrilla marketing and a key instrument, viral marketing. The analysis of current literature has also established the positive impact of WOM on box office revenue within the pre-release and opening week of a film. On the other hand, film related eWOM, specifically on SNSs, is still a relatively unexplored area and insights into the impact of viral videos on eWOM could provide a wealth of knowledge for marketers. Consequently, this paper contributes to marketing and film literature through a deeper understanding of eWOM during pre-release and opening week initiated by film-related viral videos.

METHODS

Research Aim

To investigate the use of viral videos used in film marketing, and the impact on electronic word of mouth during a films pre-release and opening week.

Research Objectives

RO1: To analyse the impact of viral videos on the volume of eWOM.

RO2: To explore the motivations behind audience participation in eWOM.

RO3: To identify viral techniques used within video content to encourage eWOM.

Mixed Method Design

The study adopted a pragmatic approach that embraced the integration of methods in order to come to a more comprehensive understanding of the research aim and eventually obtain credible results (Duemer and Zebidi 2009). Research used an explanatory sequential mixed method design in which the interpretation of qualitative results helped to explain the initial quantitative findings (Creswell 2010). In the first, quantitative phase of the study, data was collected from Twitter to understand how eWOM volume was impacted (RO1). The second, qualitative phase explored reasons as to why eWOM volume was impacted, through a textual analysis of individual Tweets (RO2) and videos (RO3).

Sample

The study used purposeful sampling to select four extreme cases of film related viral videos. The selection of extreme cases exemplifies contexts where viral videos were perceived notably as a success (Suri 2011), and the extreme outcomes are relevant to improving other, more typical videos (Patton 2015). Viral video information was collected from Unruly Media (<http://viralvideochart.unrulymedia.com>), a company specialising in social video advertising and paired with the film information collected from BoxOfficeMojo (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com>) including film title and release date (Table 1.0).

Table 1.0: Data of the Sample Viral Videos

Video	Title	Upload Date	Film	Release Date	Shares	Views
1	Telekinetic Coffee Shop Surprise (CarrieNYC 2013)	07/10/13	<i>Carrie</i> (2013)	18/10/13	2,365,673	61,414,153
2	Devil Baby Attack (DevilsDueNYC 2014)	14/01/14	<i>Devil's Due</i> (2014)	17/01/14	2,172,315	52,553,556
3	Unlock the 007 in you. You have 70 seconds! (Coca-Cola Zero 2012)	18/10/12	<i>Skyfall</i> (2012)	09/11/12	1,004,232	11,089,479
4	Ape With AK-47 (Apes Will Rise 2011)	06/07/11	<i>Rise of the Planet of the Apes</i> (2011)	05/08/11	2,002,046	34,751,263

*Combined data from Unruly Media and Box Office Mojo as of 27th February 2015.

Quantitative Method

Firstly the study used a quantitative approach to record the volume of eWOM. As the largest and most popular micro blogging site, Twitter was used to measure eWOM through individual Tweets referencing the viral video. To identify Tweets related to each viral video, the study used the Twitter Advanced Search tool (www.twitter.com/search-advanced). The exact phrase function searched for all Tweets that included the videos title over a specific time period, with a total of 34,237 Tweets recorded across all four videos. In addition to recording the volume of Tweets, research also noted if individual Tweets included a link to the video and if the related film was mentioned. The time period for data collection was selected from the date the video was uploaded through to the opening week of the film.

Qualitative Method

Secondly, a subsample of Tweets was used for qualitative research to explore audiences sharing intentions. Research conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of Tweet content and expression. Since there are no existing validated sampling methods for Twitter (Chew and Eysenbach 2010), sample size was based on feasibility and determined the first 300 Tweets for each viral video on date of upload would be sufficient to capture a 'snapshot' of audiences initial reactions. Similar to a study by Chew and Eysenbach (2010), research used a coding scheme to identify the Tweets content, how it was expressed and the type of link posted. Preliminary coding of 100 Tweets provided the initial categories, as outlined in Table 2.0. Of the total 1,200 Twitter sample, 39 Tweets were discounted due to language restrictions.

Table 2.0: Descriptions and Examples of Content, Qualifiers and Links.

	Description	Example Tweet
Content		
Resource	Tweet contains only information on the video.	'Filmed in NYC'
Personal Opinion	Twitter user shares their opinion on the video.	'This is horrible and hysterical at the same time'
Qualifier		
Humour	Tweet suggests comedic value.	'I just laughed so hard at the people's reactions...I cried!' '#ijustfelloverlaughing'
Enjoyment	Tweet expresses positive attitude.	'This is awesome'
Neutral	Tweet does not express opinion.	'This was dope'
Afraid	Tweet expresses fear, anxiety or worry.	'youtu.be//IOxISOr3_M?a' 'Video: tumblr.co/ZxUflx2d56-'
Recommendation	Tweet encourages followers to watch the video.	'I wouldn't want to see this'
Praise	Tweet commends marketing.	'SO worth the couple minutes to watch' 'You must watch this caught on camera moments!' 'Brilliant marketing' 'Guerilla marketing at its finest'
Links		
YouTube	YouTube webpage containing video.	'youtu.be//IOxISOr3_M?a'
News Website	Webpage links to news content.	'duvalguillaume.com/news/2012/unlo...'
Blog	Webpage that the user may post thoughts and opinions.	'wp.me/p3jSxa-3yh'
Social Networks	Links to social networking page excluding Twitter.	'tumblr.co/ZxUflx2d56-'
No Reference	Tweet does not include a URL.	
Not Accessible	URL is not accessible.	

Finally a textual analysis was carried out on the sample of viral videos. The results formed the basis to establish the dominant techniques of video production that encourages audiences to share content. To identify techniques, variables previously established by Almaraz et al. (2013) were used, including: narrative elements, sound context, textual elements, visual identity, genre and creativity. In addition, the duration, presence of humour and emotions experienced were also included as variables as previously explored by Dafonte-Gomez (2014).

Limitations

There are a number of methodological limitations to the study that consider the reliability, validity and authenticity of the data. An important limitation is the use of extreme cases that lack generalisability and reliability, due to the unrepresentative size of the sample (Suri 2011). However the authenticity of the data lies in the mixed method design, that provides information not just on the impact on eWOM, but also explanatory insights into underlying motivations to share videos; therefore such enhanced information contributes to enhanced credibility (Mertens and Hesse-Biber 2012).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will analyse and explore the research findings in relation to the research objectives previously outlined. Prior to the analysis, a brief synopsis of each video is provided.

Video 1, promoting the film *Carrie* (2013), shows a hidden camera experiment that captures the reactions of unsuspecting customers at a New York City coffee shop as they witness a telekinetic event. Video 2, promoting the film *Devil's Due* (2014), shows an animatronic devil baby in a remote controlled stroller going on a rampage in New York City, with hidden cameras recording people's reactions. Video 3, promoting the film *Skyfall* (2012), shows a Coca-Cola Zero vending machine challenging unsuspecting train passengers to unlock the 007 in them and race to platform 6 for their chance to win exclusive tickets to the film. Video 4, promoting the film *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), shows footage from the 20th Century Fox Research Library of a group of soldiers running in fear when an ape is passed a gun and starts firing into the ground. To identify each of the viral videos discussed in the analysis, please refer to the video stills in Figure 3.0.

Figure 3.0: Compilation of Video Stills from Viral Videos



Video 1: Telekinetic Coffee Shop Surprise



Video 2: Devil Baby Attack



Video 3: Unlock the 007 in you. You have 70 seconds!



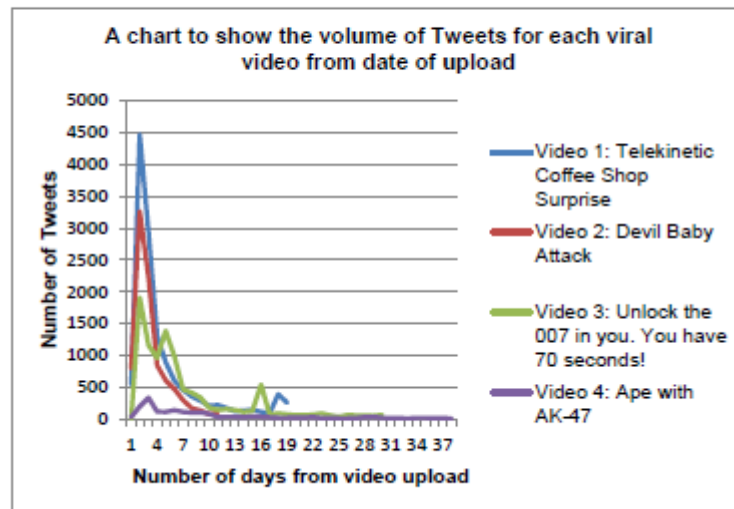
Video 4: Ape with AK-47

Section one

RO1: To analyse the impact of viral videos on the volume of eWOM.

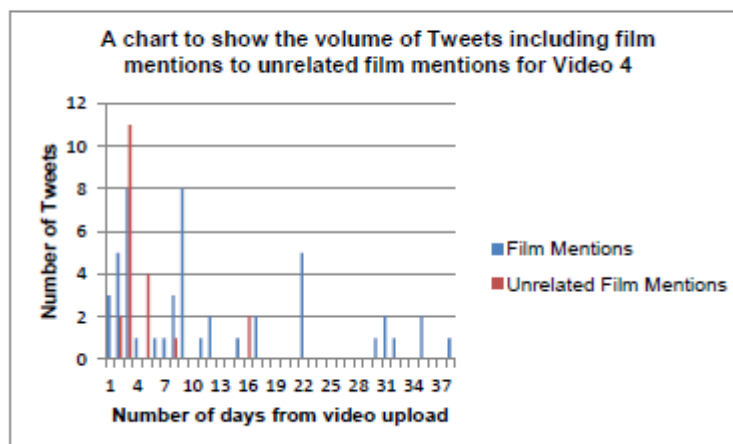
Tweet volume data shows that the viral videos significantly increased the volume of eWOM. Represented by Tweets, the highest volume of eWOM occurred within the first three days of video upload (Figure 4.0). The content was therefore diffused at a very fast pace through the Internet and experienced rapid popularity. With a total of 4,465 Tweets on day 2, video 1 received the highest volume of eWOM, and therefore is the most successful video of the sample to initiate online conversation. This represents 4,465 interactions with the content; however audience reach was significantly higher. This is due to the fact that each Tweet can be seen by the users Twitter followers and each user has a varying number of followers. Thus, the volume of individual Tweets represents only a small percentage of total audience reach.

Figure 4.0: Volume of Tweets



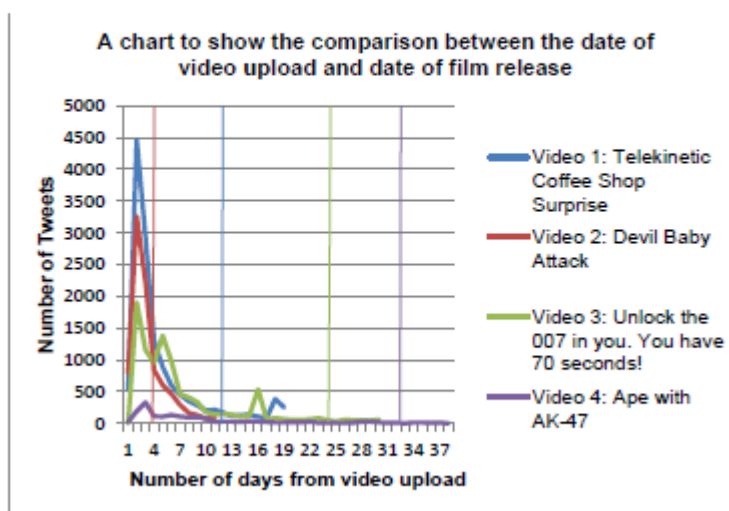
Although research shows an increased volume of eWOM in relation to the viral video, findings also indicate a subsequent increase in film related eWOM. An average of 9.5% of all Tweets mentioned the film promoted by the viral video. This shows audiences have a greater awareness of the film and, as suggested by Liu (2006), a greater awareness can drive audiences to the cinema. On the other hand, video 4 received the lowest volume of film mentions with an average of only 2.6% of Tweets including the film’s title. Findings also show that within the first 5 days, Tweets mentioning video 4 referenced another film unrelated to the video content (Figure 5.0). This indicates that audiences were unable to connect the viral video to the film being promoted; therefore suggesting video 4 was the weakest example of initiating eWOM in relation to the promoted film. Thus, the positive impact of viral videos on eWOM, in order to increase film awareness, is dependent upon the audiences’ ability to connect the video content to the film promoted.

Figure 5.0: Film Mentions



Developing on the strength of a viral video’s connection to the promoted film, findings suggest the date of video upload can be strategically positioned in relation to the film’s release. Each of the viral videos upload strategies were dramatically different, as shown in Figure 6.0, through corresponding vertical lines representing the film’s release date. Video 2 received the highest level of eWOM on the date of release compared to video 1, 3 and 4 that show levels had significantly decreased by the time the film was released. This provides a framework for the strategic upload of a video to increase eWOM at the desired time. For example, if the marketer wanted to encourage a prolonged period of eWOM, a similar timeline to video 3 could be used. Comparing the timeline between the most shared, video 1, and the least shared, video 4, data suggests the optimum video upload period is approximately two weeks before a film’s release.

Figure 6.0: Film Release



In addition to maximising the upload strategy, findings highlighted a number of influential factors that contributed to the increase of eWOM. The volume of Tweets for video 2 was significantly impacted on the date of upload following an article published on BuzzFeed, an online source for social content, which promoted the video. Similarly, video 3 demonstrated a peak in volume of Tweets following an article titled *YouTube’s 20 Most-Shared Ads in October*. The article was published on Mashable, an online source of news, 16 days after video upload and featured video 3 as the ‘Most-Shared Ad’. BuzzFeed and Mashable therefore represent examples of network gatekeepers that exist within the online environment that can positively influence the volume of eWOM.

Another factor identified as influential was the use of supplementary content. Across the 34,237 Tweets collected, 95.9% that mentioned the viral video’s title also included a link to the video on YouTube or embedded within another site. However Figure 3 shows a small peak in the volume of Tweets for video 1 occurring 17 days after upload.

On this date only 49.2% of Tweets included a link to the original video, whereas 50.8% included a link to the user-generated video *YouTubers React to Telekinetic Coffee Shop Surprise* (The FineBros 2010). Similarly, video 3 also experienced a small peak in Tweet volume 29 days after the original video was uploaded with Tweets referring to a behind the scenes video. Consequently, supplementary content to the original video resulted in sustaining online conversations over a longer period of time.

Overall, findings justify the use of viral videos in film promotion, with content positively influencing eWOM through a large volume of Tweets. As a result the rise in online conversations increased the audiences' awareness of the film, as represented by the number of film title mentions during pre-release and opening week. Additionally, marketers can increase the volume of eWOM through an effective upload strategy two weeks prior to a film's release, targeting gatekeepers to disseminate the video and releasing supplementary content to sustain online conversation over a prolonged period of time.

Section 2

RO2: To explore the motivations behind audience participation in eWOM.

In order to explore why audiences share viral videos, research conducted a qualitative analysis studying the additional comments users made when discussing the viral videos on Twitter. Tweet content data provided an insight into sharing intentions and the individual's viewing experience. Findings show the viral videos were shared alongside an expression of personal opinion focusing on the individual's reaction to the video. Comments predominantly mentioned a factor of enjoyment or humour they experienced suggesting the feel-good factor propelled sharing. However, comments expressing negative emotions were used as warnings to other viewers.

Tweets expressing neutrality (48% average) and enjoyment (28% average), were the most common across all videos (Table 3.0). The large quantity of neutral Tweets correlates with the quantity of Tweets sharing content as a resource. Whilst the individual Tweet is neutral, the act of sharing the video to followers could be interpreted as a positive attitude towards the content. Furthermore the high percentage of personal opinion Tweets expressing enjoyment suggests users shared the video link in order for others to experience the same positive emotion. In particular, video 4 received the largest amount of positive commentary (42%), with a significant level of users directly recommending followers to watch the video (14%). Tweets described the video as "amazing", "funny" and "unusual." Consequently, in addition to enjoyment positively influencing sharing, the viewer interpreting the content as "unusual" encourages audiences to share the video with Twitter followers.

Table 3.0: Content, Qualifiers and Links of Manually Coded Tweets

	Number of Tweets (%)			
	Video 1	Video 2	Video 3	Video 4
Content				
Resource	135 (46)	123 (41)	177 (66)	108 (36)
Personal Opinion	159 (54)	177 (59)	90 (34)	192 (64)
Qualifier*				
Humour	39 (13)	69 (23)	3 (1)	21 (7)
Enjoyment	81 (28)	84 (28)	57 (21)	126 (42)
Neutral	141 (48)	123 (41)	177 (66)	105 (35)
Fear	6 (2)	33 (11)	0 (0)	9 (3)
Recommendation	9 (3)	18 (6)	6 (2)	42 (14)
Praise	30 (10)	21 (7)	27 (10)	0 (0)
Links				
YouTube	285 (97)	264 (88)	243 (92)	273 (91)
News Website	2 (1)	6 (2)	6 (2)	12 (4)
Blog	6 (2)	9 (3)	6 (2)	3 (1)
Social Networks	0 (0)	18 (6)	11 (4)	0 (0)
No Reference	0 (0)	3 (1)	1 (0)	12 (4)
Not Accessible	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

**The percent total will not equal 100% as tweets with multiple qualifiers were coded multiple times.*

The proportion of Tweets containing resourceful content compared to personal opinion is similar across videos 1, 2 and 4, with personal opinion greater; however video 3 varies with the majority of Tweets sharing the content as a resource. Identifying similar patterns differentiating video 3 from video 1, 2 and 4, video 3 received significantly less Tweets referring to the fear caused by the content. Therefore, findings indicate that viral videos that prompt fear, anxiety and distress are shared with additional comments expressing the viewer’s opinion, whereas videos that do not prompt such emotion, such as video 3, are merely shared as a resource.

Personal opinions expressing fear as a result of the content reinforces the ethical issues associated with guerilla marketing, as previously highlighted by Canan et al. (2010). Focusing on the example of video 2 with the highest quantity of Tweets commenting on fear factors, viewers described the experience as “disturbing” and “scary.” These words can be associated with negative emotions that the viewer may not have necessarily desired to experience. The contradictory use of these words within a Tweet that also contains a link to the video, encouraging others to watch it, could signify a warning to the audience before they watch the video. Ethical issues therefore arise as to whether the content should have a warning embedded within the video.

Although commentary highlights possible ethical issues, a large amount of conversation on Twitter praised video 1, 2 and 3’s marketing efforts. Comments such as “guerilla marketing at its finest,” and “best promo idea I’ve ever seen,” propose that users are inclined to share content if they view it as successful and engaging marketing. On the other hand, video 4 received no praise for marketing efforts, suggesting that the video may not have been interpreted by the audience as marketing.

Overall, research achieved objective 2 through the analysis of online conversation. Findings indicate that users who shared the content as a resource could not be classified as neutral as the act of sharing could be interpreted as a positive attitude towards the video. Analysis of commentary within Tweets containing personal opinion highlighted the viewer's intention to share content that they enjoyed or found humorous. Other factors that motivated audiences to share their opinion included interpreting the content as unusual, or commending marketing efforts. The use of fear factors also increased the amount of personal opinion expressed in Tweets, however users appeared to be warning audiences before watching the video.

Section 3

RO3: To identify viral techniques used within video content to encourage eWOM.

RO3 develops findings by studying how certain characteristics within the video content could have prompted conversation, thus indicating how videos can be optimised for sharing. The textual analysis identified three key techniques used within video content to increase sharing; originality, humour and emotion. However, in contrast to previous research, video duration and the level of branding appeared to have little impact on forwarding intentions.

The textual analysis highlighted ways in which original concepts were implemented in order to increase sharing, and promote a film in a unique and creative way. The most prominent use of creativity was the way in which a single element of the promoted film was incorporated into the video. For example, video 1 used a character based on the film's protagonist, Carrie, to prank coffee shop visitors into believing she had telekinetic powers. The most impactful moment of the video is the first stage of the prank in which a man is lifted up a wall. Already aware of the prank's set up, the viewer is surprised by the realistic display of supernatural powers which is created through the smooth execution of the stunt. The content's original and creative idea ensured viewers perceived the video as unique, which in turn may have encouraged sharing.

Furthermore, findings support that the level of originality is based on the frequency of use, as previously explored by Jurca (2010). For example, video 2, released a year after video 1, used a similar style of prank to shock passers-by in the streets of New York. The videos creativity lies in the realistic image of the baby with fully animated facial expressions and body movement. Although conversely, the baby's ability to projectile vomit could be viewed as a creative weakness due to its graphic and unappealing nature. In addition, it could be argued that video 2 was not as widely shared because it mimicked aspects of video 1 which the audience may have already seen. This shows that the creation of future videos should refrain from imitating past successful viral videos and instead aim to produce a fresh, original concept that viewers have not watched before. This supports Prevot's (2009) findings that the guerrilla effect is maximised through originality and creativity, enabling the categorisation of the campaign as unconventional.

Videos used a variety of methods to add comedic value to the content resulting in an increase in audience engagement. Video 1, 2 and 3 used humour through the recording of unsuspecting participants reactions to an unusual event. Moreover, the use of hidden cameras suggested the participants had no prior indication of the event and therefore the viewer perceives the reactions as credible. In video 3, hidden cameras located in a station in Belgium caught participant's reactions when challenged to race to platform 6. This video in particular demonstrated humour as a central component through the use of additional obstacles. The obstacles optimised the viewer's entertainment as they watched participants navigate around a sheet of glass, stumble

over oranges and hum the theme tune to James Bond. Audience entertainment was also increased in video 1 and 2 by giving the viewer an insight into how the prank was setup. This maximises viewers' enjoyment when watching the prank as viewers can focus on the comedic reactions as opposed to trying to understand how the events occur.

Video content also highlighted the use of humorous text to engage the viewer. After an introduction showing how the prank was set up, video 1 uses text to introduce the footage (Figure 7.0).

Figure 7.0: Video Still from Video 1



The explicit language used adds comedic value as the viewer does not expect the bold dialect. The informal tone also imitates a personal connection with the viewer, which could represent marketing efforts to attract the younger cinema audience that is rapidly declining (Spangler 2014).

In contrast, video 4's comedic value is limited due to the overpowering imagery depicting human lives in danger. The video portrays the unusual event of an ape commandeering a gun and firing at soldiers that could be perceived as frightening to viewers. This is intensified by the use of a video production technique called shaky camera that purposefully films the event in a documentary style. Similar to *The Blair Witch Project*, the shaky camera adds to the credibility of the footage, suggesting an unprepared, unrehearsed filming of reality. In turn, the portrayal of the realistic event could cause anxiety to viewers. This example represents a strong use of an unconventional concept, however the level of humour has been restricted due to the dangerous event portrayed in a realistic format.

In line with previous research (Dobele et al. 2007; Botha and Reyneke 2013), findings show that high arousal emotions were used to increase sharing. The two most prominent emotions experienced within the sample of viral videos were amusement and surprise, correlating with studies by Dafonte-Gomez (2014) and Eckler and Bolls (2011). In video 2 the viewer experiences amusement when members of the public are surprised but also whilst watching the reactions of the individuals when they realise it is a prank and the baby is not real. Experiencing these positive emotions could have led to the sharing of the video within social networks. Moreover, the act of sharing a positive video could have enhanced the individual's self-worth, a primary factor influencing participation in eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

Surprise was also incorporated into the video content to encourage online conversation. Video 1, 2 and 3 incorporated surprise through a thrilling action of street marketing, developed in a public space and recorded with a hidden camera (Dafonte-Gómez 2014). In contrast, video 4 used surprise through a fictional stunt that showed activities impossible to perform by the person doing them (Dafonte-Gómez 2014). In both cases, the use of surprise increased the high arousal emotions experienced by the

viewer. Findings show a variety of ways marketers can incorporate surprise into video content, whether it is through a real stunt, fictional stunt or surprise event.

On the other hand, the implementation of surprise on unsuspecting individuals could lead to a number of ethical issues (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004). Analysis shows that the large majority of participants within the video experienced a variety of negative emotions such as shock, alarm, distress and fear. Without prior warning of the event, participants appear vulnerable and do not have a choice as to their involvement. Future practice should therefore consider the ethical implications of approaching members of the public without prior warning, as it could be interpreted as intrusive (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004).

The videos successfully evoked the emotions analysed above, in an average video duration of 1 minute 66 seconds. This challenges McNeal's (2012) findings that clips around 3 minutes long are more likely to evoke emotions than shorter segments. Shorter segments successfully evoking emotions could be attributed to the rapidly advancing digital technology that is evolving the way audiences digest content (Jeffrey 2014). As audiences digest content quicker, marketers can produce short, engaging videos for promotion.

Although all videos used the YouTube account name to link the content to the promoted film, the level of branding within the videos varied. Video 1 and 2 followed a similar structure using a clip of the promoted film at the end of the video and informed audiences of the release date and hashtag. However video 2, released a year after video 1, also included a logo to show the classification of the film as restricted (R). As a result this could suggest video 2 was ethically aware of the audience they were marketing to; ensuring content was not misinterpreted by a younger audience. In contrast to Hsieh's (2012) findings, the videos with the most prominent branding (video 1 and 2) were shared the most, therefore it could be suggested that branding did not deter audiences from sharing the content. In addition, the integration of branding from a film's sponsor did not deter sharing. Video 3, solely produced by the film's sponsor, Coca-Cola Zero, simultaneously promoted both brands. Whilst the sponsor's product was featured throughout, the video also used film imagery and the iconic James Bond theme tune to ensure audiences associated the video to the film *Skyfall*.

In contrast, video 4 used extremely subtle branding by linking the video to the film studio through the on screen text "20th Century Fox Research Library". The viewer could also draw a very faint connection between the ape in the video firing a gun, and the film's protagonist, Caesar, who possesses human intelligence, although this also has limitations. The ape depicted in the video appears to the viewer as a real life primate, however when watching the film the viewer understands the ape is a fictional character that has been digitally created. Thus the different aesthetics of the characters may not prompt audiences to relate the content to the film. With such subtle branding the audience must work hard to understand the subtle cues in order to relate the video to the film. Consequently, a large portion of the viewers may not connect the two texts.

Overall, research achieved objective 3 through the analysis of video content. Findings indicate that originality, humour and emotion were incorporated in a variety of ways to increase forwarding intentions. Furthermore, prominent branding ensured the viewer connected the video to the promoted film, and did not deter audiences from sharing the content. Video duration had little impact as shorter segments successfully evoked high arousal emotions.

CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of this paper was to investigate the use of viral videos in film marketing, and the impact on electronic word of mouth during a film's pre-release and opening week. Although previously explored individually, this section combines the research objectives, in which the interpretation of results from the qualitative findings of objective 2 and 3 help to explain the quantitative findings of objective 1.

Viral videos are used within film marketing to initiate eWOM that in turn creates a buzz around a film's release, increases awareness and drives audiences to the cinema. Quantitative findings found that the sample of viral videos successfully initiated eWOM, represented by a large volume of Tweets referencing both the videos and the promoted films. In addition, the overall volume of Tweets represented only a small percentage of audience reach, as each Tweet could be viewed by the user's followers. Qualitative findings indicate that the volume of eWOM was impacted by a variety of viral techniques used within the video content, such as originality, humour and emotion, which in turn increased forwarding intentions and online conversation. Through prominent branding within the majority of the video content and an average of 9.8% of all Tweets referencing the film, it can be concluded that audience film awareness was increased through the viral videos. Research therefore supports the use of viral videos used in film marketing by showing a direct impact on eWOM during pre-release and opening week.

From a practical perspective, this study offers professional recommendations into which film marketers could adopt for the future use of viral videos:

1. Ensure film branding within the video content is clear in order for the audience to easily relate the two texts and direct eWOM to the promoted film.
2. Prior to preparation and execution consider the ethical implications that may arise.
3. Avoid imitating past successful viral videos, instead aiming to produce an innovative and original concept.
4. Incorporate humour into the content with a hidden camera execution capturing audience reactions.
5. Maximise high arousal emotions by including an element of surprise.
6. Adopt an appropriate upload strategy to create maximum eWOM, with a suggested upload period of 2 weeks prior to a film's release.
7. Target network gatekeepers such as BuzzFeed and Mashable to disseminate the video to large online networks.
8. Upload supplementary content to the original video in order to sustain eWOM over a prolonged period of time.

Whilst these recommendations have been drawn from the research findings, it is acknowledged there are limitations within the research conducted. Firstly, social networking sites are evolving very fast, leading to a constant revolution of user sharing patterns and this in turn makes it difficult for the study to reach conclusions with long-term validity. In addition the data collected from Twitter resulted in a lack of a well-defined study population; whilst a user could be linked to an individual Tweet it was beyond the scope of the study to retrieve every user profile in order to determine sample demographics and geographic location. Further research into the demographics and geographic location of participants of eWOM could provide marketers with a greater understanding as to the most effective content to promote a film to a specific target audience.

A possible area for future study would be to investigate eWOM across a variety of social networking sites. This research would guide marketing efforts to the most efficient platforms for film promotion. In addition, research into the direct relationship between eWOM and box office revenue would provide further justification into the importance of creating online conversation prior to a film's release.

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