
Predicting Virality : Does Message Creativity Matter?

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Abstract

A very small percentage of potentially viral advertisement messages actually go viral. The creativity of these advertisement messages is considered crucial in making them viral. Through a review of literature, this study develops a measure to assess the creativity of potentially viral advertisement messages that can help predict their success. Using a controlled experiment on a sample of internet users, it pre-tests the measure of viral ad message creativity and explores its role in predicting viral success. The study assesses and compares the creativity, sharing, and liking of a sample of viral advertisements versus a sample of control advertisements. The results indicate the significant positive effects of perceptual creativity on shares and likes, which in turn determine viral success.

Keywords : Viral Marketing, Network marketing, creativity

Introduction :

Consumers are spending more time online than with any other marketing channel. The media landscape is changing. Peripheral activities that constituted online advertising take over the core of marketing strategy (Edelman 2007). These fundamental changes give more control to customers. After a century of being barraged with one-way marketing messages, customers have become more demanding and sophisticated; they expect more information, more value and more fun. It is essential for marketers to deliver engaging experiences that inform, educate and entertain. To spread a buzz or engage customers, marketers all over the world are going 'viral'. The pages of recent newspapers and trade journals are full of reports of controversies related to content of a viral advertisement or the results of successful viral campaigns (Porter and Golan 2006). However, on the academic front, very few empirical studies (Phelps et al. 2004; Porter and Golan 2006; Chiu et al. 2007) discuss viral advertisements. This study adds to the sparse academic literature on viral advertisements; more specifically, it focuses on the link between creativity and effectiveness of the viral advertisements.

Within the traditional advertising industry structure, because of unbundled media planners and creative team, there has been a never-ending struggle between those who created the advertisements and those managers who insisted them to be effective (Kover, Goldberg and James 1995). Many managers and academicians have mistrusted creative advertising. According to them,

creative advertising may win awards but may have little to do with advertising effectiveness (Gaylord 1994). Creative advertisements do not always result in more favorable brand attitude and purchase intention (Ang and Low 2000). The distinction between effectiveness and creativity has been more of structural, reflecting different goals and needs of different departments (Ibarra 1992). However, this traditional advertising industry structure is fundamentally changing, which shakes the roots of the distinction between effectiveness and creativity.

As the peripheral activities that constituted online advertising take over the core of marketing strategy, they are driving some radical changes in priorities, organizations and operations of marketers (Edelman 2007). These forces are restructuring advertising industry; they are bringing media-planners and creative teams closer than ever before. The idea of unbundled planners and creative teams made sense for traditional advertising, where models were set and clearly defined, and flexibility was slim. In the context of interactive internet and viral advertisements, the lines between media planners and creative teams are unclear and the level of flexibility is great. On the front end, creative teams work with media planners; on the back end, they work with campaign management teams to determine return on investment. It is not possible to design the interactive online experience without a deep understanding of the media. Great online advertising ideas come from teams, where there is no separating line between creative team and

media planners. Technology advancements and consumer intelligence insist media planners and creative teams to work and think closely together. In the context of interactive internet and viral advertisements, goals and needs of these two departments are merging. Hence, the distinction between creativity and effectiveness may blur too. Creativity may play increasingly important role in driving effectiveness of the interactive advertisements.

Few studies (Ang, Lee, and Leong 2006; Till and Baack 2005; Ang and Low 2000; Stone, Besser, and Lewis 2000; Kover, Goldberg and James 1995) have explored the link between creativity and effectiveness in the context of traditional media advertisements. These studies are not enough to address creativity-effectiveness relationship in the context of interactive advertisements. Till date, in my knowledge, no study has explored the link between creativity and effectiveness in the context of interactive advertisements. Due to considerable lack of research in this field, I derive broad research questions, which allow flexibility and receptivity of new themes that might emerge in the course of the study. Using a controlled experiment with a sample of Indian internet users, I assess the impact of creativity on the effectiveness of a set of selected viral advertisements. The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, I describe conceptual background and research questions. Following this, research methodology is explained, which includes procedure, stimuli, participants, and measures. Thereafter, data analysis and results are presented. Lastly, I discuss the results in terms of their implications for research and practice, and direction for future research.

Conceptual Background and Research Questions

Viral Marketing and Advertising

In this study, viral advertising means an “Unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others” (Porter and Golan, 2006, p. 33). Porter and Golan (2006) discussed the concepts of viral marketing and viral advertising in detail. Therefore, instead of going into the further conceptual details, I very briefly review important scholarly works in this field.

Helm (2000) used the Hotmail case to interpret viral marketing as a method of both marketing and distribution of digital products via emails. The “viral” concept was limited to only digital products. Welker (2002) expanded this concept to include the possibility to distribute information about non-digital products virally and defined viral communications. Subramani and Rajagopalan, (2003) further enhanced this concept by focusing on persuasive and influence potentials of the viral communications. Viral marketing has also been referred to as “word-of-mouth,” “creating a buzz,” “leveraging the media,” and “network marketing (Wilson 2000). Focusing on e word-of-mouth, Phelps et al. (2004) empirically examined consumer responses and motivations to pass along email and recommended that viral advertisers

should focus on desires for fun, entertainment and social connections. More recently, Smith, et al. (2007) examined nature and influence of social networks, characteristics of the most influential individuals and characteristics of viral marketing messages. Niederhoffer, et al. (2007) explored role of buzz in new product launches. Chiu et al (2007) conducted an important study to find out determinants of the effects of a viral campaign. Though these studies have important insights for viral advertisers, specifically, from advertising point of view, the viral concept has got very limited scholarly attention. Porter and Golan (2006) first time defined viral advertisements and identified important differences between television and viral advertisements. Till date, in my knowledge, no study has discussed concepts of creativity and effectiveness of viral advertising and link between them.

Effectiveness of Viral Advertising

Advertising effectiveness is described as being a hierarchy of effects; advertisements may change people’s perception and that eventually may change their behavior (Vakratas and Tim 1999). Traditionally, marketers used to set different kinds of objectives for advertising and marketing, based on the notion that advertising works on the communication aspects of the hierarchy (e.g. awareness, attitude), while marketing works on the higher-level behavioral goals (e.g. purchase, brand loyalty). Advertising took place only in the media, while the retail environment was the only place to focus on changing behaviors. Based on such notion, in the literature, measures of traditional media advertising effectiveness used to focus on recall or persuasion. These traditional advertisement effectiveness measures include likeability, (Leather, McKechnie, and Amirkhanian 1994), attractiveness (Wells 2000), attitude toward the brand (Ang and Low 2000), and recall (Higie and Sewall 1991).

Though, these measures of traditional media advertisement effectiveness may be useful to measure interactive internet and viral advertisement effectiveness, they are not sufficient. Internet and viral advertising compresses the hierarchy of effects (McMillan 2004); they may build awareness of a brand, at the same time, they are also designed to encourage click-through to a website that often sells the products or services. Therefore, along with recall and liking for the interactive internet and viral advertisement, it is also important to use some more action oriented web-specific measures. Examples of action oriented web-specific measures of advertisement effectiveness are click-through rates, advertising transfers (Briggs and Hollis 1997), visit duration (visit to the company’s website that sells the product or service), conversion rate (visit to purchase), number of transactions (Dreze and Zufryden 1998) or number of visitor sessions, and average length of the sessions (Keiser 2002).

Creativity of Viral Advertising

Creativity is a very complex human behavior to describe (Amabile 1982; Runco and Sakamoto 1999). Wide variety

of views described creativity. After long debates, in developing a definition of creativity, researchers have achieved some consensus. First, they agree that at least one facet of creativity must be originality, novelty, or newness (Sternberg and Lubart 1996). Second, they agree that originality is not enough and creativity is therefore multifaceted (Mumford and Gustafson 1988). However, the question of what constitutes the second factor has been widely debated. One suggestion is that creative products are novel and useful or satisfying to some group at some time (Stein 1953), others define creative products as original and having worth or usefulness (Rothenberg and Hausman 1976), and still others argue that the second facet should be related to problem solving, situational appropriateness, goal accomplishment (MacKinnon 1965) or even value (Young 1985). Although these second facets appear related, when operationalized, they again become varied. Summarizing these works, Runco and Charles (1993) proposed and tested a measurement model for creative outputs based on two variables: originality and appropriateness. Though other views are still being advanced (e.g., Mellou 1996), the originality-appropriateness model has become the most widely accepted (Amabile 1998; Kasof 1995).

Reid, King, and De Lorme (1998, p.3) defined advertising creativity as “original, and imaginative thought designed to produce goal directed and problem solving advertisements”. This definition is in line with the mainstream creativity research, which emphasize originality or novelty, and meaningful or appropriateness. However, Ang, Lee and Leong (2007) argue that the novelty and meaningfulness are not enough because both these facets address advertising creativity from the message stand point; a more complete account of advertising creativity should include perspectives of audience in terms of connectedness. Creative advertisements must connect with the audience. According to them, a creative advertisement is “perceived by its audience to be novel and different, and whose central message is interpreted meaningfully by, and connects with, its audience” (p. 7).

Creativity refers to a wide range of activities such as original or novel thinking, exploration, experimentation and imagination as well as more postmodern qualities of intuition, playfulness and self expression (Higgins and Morgan 2000). When it comes to traditional media advertising, creative term has been used in a somewhat narrow sense. Conceptually, the term “advertising creativity” has been used for the “process of producing and developing advertising ideas” (El Murad and West 2004, p. 188). Though, the advertising process included media-planning, targeting, development, execution, measurement, and feedback, advertising creativity term referred to creativity of only one part of the whole advertising process.

In the context of interactive advertising, creativity is no longer linked to only development of advertising ideas. All three important processes of interactive advertisements i.e. targeting, development and

measurement have enormous potentials to be creative. Creativity in targeting of advertisement may get reflected in its use of medium; creativity in development of advertisement may get reflected in its copy writing and design; creativity in measurement may get reflected in its ability to measure actual impacts and get feedback for further innovation. Judging criteria for the most respected internet advertisement awards and competition also revolves around all these dimensions. For example the judging criteria for Web Award Internet Advertising Competition (IAC) developed by the Web Marketing Association include innovation, impact, design, copy writing, use of the medium and overall creativity. Organizations are striving to achieve creativity in all the three interactive advertising processes. Due to comparatively less control, and more importance of the luck factor, instead of targeting, development and measurement, the more appropriate approach for viral advertising is experiment, monitor and respond. And creativity is again at the heart of all three phases of viral advertising process.

Advertising creativity commonly referred to creativity of an advertisement idea i.e. a creative product-an output of a process. In the context of traditional media, barring a study (Hill and Johnson 2004) almost no scholarly work has focused on a creative advertising process. “What” were the advertising ideas had the highest potentials to be creative, compared to “How” they were planned, conceived, executed, monitored and responded. Creative products were more important than the creative process; art was more important than creative technology or science. Advertising creativity has been considered the “least scientific” aspect of advertising (Reid, King, and Delorme 1998).

In the context of interactive advertising, creativity is definitely not the “least scientific” aspect of advertising. Enormous data are bombarding marketing organizations from multiple sources like advertising servers, search engines and websites. With all these complex data flows, organizations need to merge art with creative technology for targeting and measurement of interactive advertising. Creative teams, analysts and media-planners work closely together. Designs for campaigns have targeting and optimization planning baked into them, as the analytics works join the account and media planners at the program concept design table (Edelman 2007). Even in case of development of interactive internet and viral advertisement, art or beauty is again powered by a framework of technology. “What-if” analysis linked to an advertising idea must meet “how to” part of it, where creative technology plays an important role. Creativity of interactive internet and viral advertising is the most scientific and the most artistic aspect of advertising, where the interactive advertising process and its output i.e. interactive advertisement both are important. This study mainly focuses on creativity of the viral advertisements i.e. creativity of a central idea and content of the viral advertisements. During the experiment, while assessing effects of viral advertisement’s creativity on its effectiveness, viral advertising process is controlled.

Effects of Viral Advertisements' Creativity on Effectiveness

Creative idea is an essential part of a viral advertisement. For a viral advertisement to work, it has to be extremely good, absolutely hilarious or shocking. However, after creating the most creative advertisements ever, one simply can't expect to post them on You Tube and let them go viral on their own (Greenberg 2007). For achieving true effectiveness, the viral advertising idea and process both require creativity. Hence, there are chances that even less creative advertisement may be more effective with the use of more creative viral advertising process and vice versa. This argument implies that creativity of content of viral advertisements may not matter much. However, another argument suggests that when separating lines between analysts, media planners, and creative teams are blurring, creative idea of a viral advertisement is a result of a creative advertising process and it reflects creativity of the advertising process. Hence, there are very high chances that the creative viral advertisements, being the results of creative viral advertising process are more effective. In the absence of previous research, to explore effectiveness of creative viral advertisements, instead of deriving propositions in favor or against of any of these arguments, in the following section, I derive broad research questions.

As creativity of viral advertisements is essential, it is not possible to compare creative viral advertisements with a non-creative one, and find out which one is more effective. Non-creative viral advertisement does not exist. Hence, it is important to understand how to operationalize creativity of viral advertisements. A variety of operationalizations for creativity emerged in the previous research, including the use of advertising award-winners as a proxy for creativity (e.g., Kover, Goldberg, and James 1995). This method is based on the concept that creativity is, in the end, a subjective concept best evaluated by professionals (Amabile 1982). Therefore, if the judges of these awards determine that the advertisement is creative enough to be recognized for this award, then this judgment is an appropriate measure of creativity (White and Smith 2001). There have been a lot of criticisms that advertising awards are like "beauty contests" (Moriarty 1996, p. 54), focusing on industry-specific criteria (Kover, James, and Sonner 1997; White and Smith 2001) rather than on the actual effectiveness of the advertisements. With such an industry focus on creative advertising, and criticisms of creative advertising competitions, it is surprising that so little research really looks directly at the effectiveness of award-winning advertisements. Few studies in the context of traditional media advertisements (Kover, Goldberg, and James 1995; Ang and Low 2000; Stone, Besser, and Lewis 2000; Brian, Till and Baac 2005) are quite important in providing some initial signs that creativity may be positively linked to the effectiveness. No study till date in my knowledge has explored effectiveness of award-winning internet advertisements or viral advertisements. Therefore, the study aim to explore,

Research Question-1: Do the award winning viral advertisements have significantly higher effectiveness

than non-award winning (control) internet viral advertisements?

Understanding whether creative award winning internet viral advertisements are more effective than others is vital, but a fundamental and frustrating limitation is that concept of creativity is subjective, and perceptions of creativity differ depending on whom one asks. In addition to the criticisms of use of award winning advertisement as a proxy of creativity, Kover, Goldberg, and James, (1995) provide the empirical evidence that the creativity awards judges' perceptions of creativity differ from the consumers' perceptions of it. As creativity is supposed to be essential part of viral advertisements, it is more interesting to explore whether the consumers really perceive the award-winning advertisements to be more creative or not. Therefore, the study aim to explore,

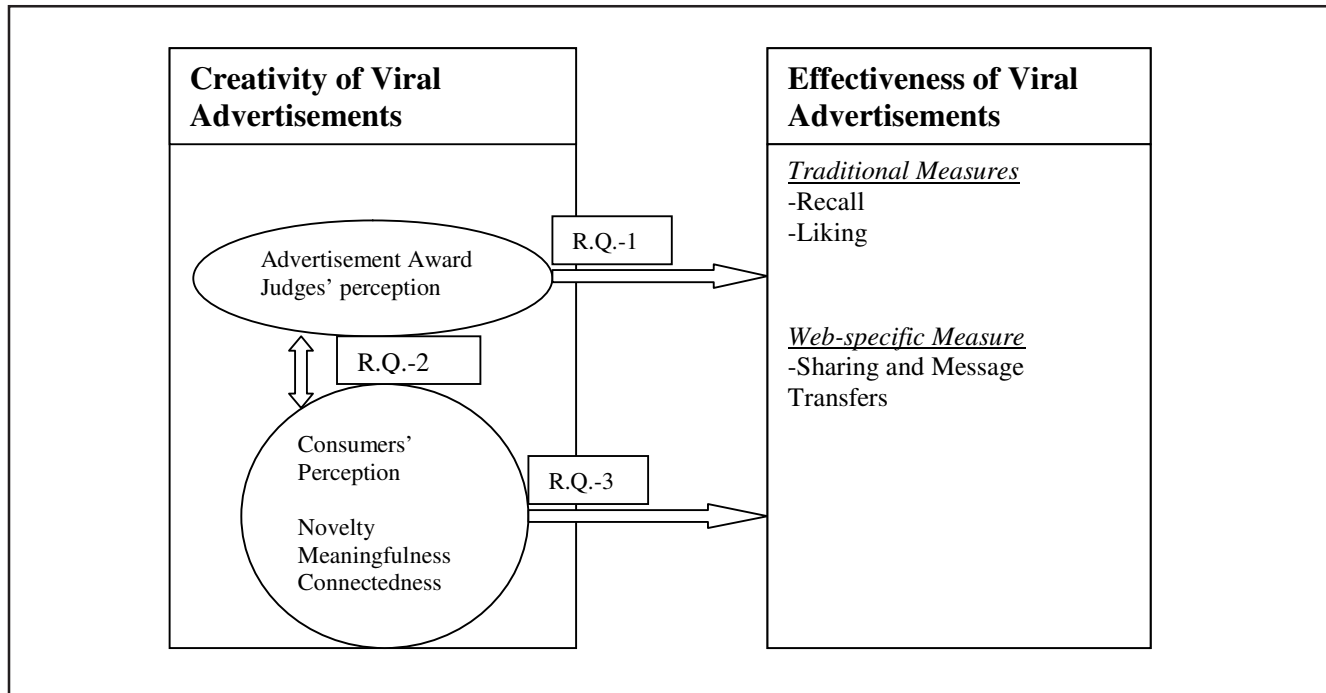
Research Question-2: Do the award winning internet viral advertisements have perceived to be significantly more creative than non-award winning (control) internet advertisements?

Perceptions about subjective advertising creativity have been generally measured on the two facets: novelty, and meaningfulness. Both these facets of subjective creativity have found to be important in affecting different measures of advertisement effectiveness (Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002; Smith and Yang 2004; Till and Baack 2005). Ang, Lee and Leong (2006) added one more dimension of advertising creativity i.e. the connectedness. They found that advertisements which connected with the audience elicited higher recall, more favorable attitudes toward advertisement elements, and warmer feelings than those that did not connect. Till and Baack (2005) observed that award-winning advertisements facilitated higher unaided recall but did not enhance brand attitude, and purchase intention. Possibly, award-winning advertisements are novel but less meaningful or connected. There is no study till date explores relative importance and effects of these three dimensions of advertising creativity on advertisement effectiveness. Therefore, the study aim to explore,

3) Do the perceptions of novelty, meaningfulness and connectedness affect effectiveness of the viral advertisements?

Figure-1 broadly describes the conceptual foundation of the study that links creativity and effectiveness of the viral advertisements.

Fig 1 : Linking Creativity With Effectiveness of Viral Advertisements



Research Method

This study is based on a controlled experiment conducted to explore the effects of creativity on effectiveness of internet viral advertisements.

Procedure

Following a pre-test with a sample of academic professionals and graduate students, through the intranet, four viral advertisements were sent to 150 graduate students from two Indian Universities in four different mails. In a next mail, instructions and evaluation sheets were attached. After viewing the viral advertisements, participants were asked to rate each viral advertisement for its creativity and liking. The students' perception of creativity and liking were measured. Within a week, 135 students returned the mails with filled evaluation sheets. After one week of the first mail, one more mail was sent to each participant to measure advertisement recall and transfers, in which they were asked to list the viral advertisements that they could recall, and the viral advertisements that they have forwarded to one or more people. Within a week, all 135 students replied the mail and provided the required information. 4 participants' evaluation sheets had some missing information. Total of 131 participants' data were used for further analysis. Before the students participate and fill the evaluation sheet, it was ensured that he/she did not come across any of these viral advertisements before.

Stimuli

Creative viral advertisement sample included two Abby awards winning viral advertisements of 2006. The ABBY awards organized by Ad-club Bombay are the most prestigious advertisement award show to honor creativity

in Indian advertising. Control viral advertisement sample included two non-award winning viral advertisements. Appendix A presents links and descriptions of these viral advertisements. The sample of viral advertisements is not age or gender specific. All the advertisements in the sample are humorous, and of general interest and are part of a same brand campaign. Brand familiarity is one variable shown to affect advertisement effectiveness measures (Kent and Allen 1994; Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002). To rule this out as a possible explanation for the results, I preferred to include all the same brand advertisement in the sample. The relatively new phenomenon of viral advertising required the use of a convenience sample of award winning and control viral advertisements.

Participants

A sample of 131 graduate students from two Indian Universities participated in the study. All the students had 24 hours internet access and they were regularly surfing Internet and checking e-mails minimum once a day. 44 percent of the students were females and other 56 percent were males; their mean age was 24 years. Though, the participants were demographically diverse, all of them knew Hindi (the language used in the viral advertisements) and English languages.

Measures

All the measurement items are adapted from the existing scales. 17 items questionnaire developed and pre tested with one viral advertisement on a small sample of academic professionals and graduate students ensures clarity. The questionnaire consists of two sections: (1) creativity of the viral advertisement, and (2) effectiveness

of the viral advertisement. A five point (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), Likert type scales are used to assess creativity and effectiveness of the viral advertisements, and scale points are summed to create a scale score.

Creativity of Viral Advertisements

Researchers at the State University College at Buffalo (Besemer and O'Quin 1986; O'Quin and Besemer 1989) have developed a 55 item measure called Creative Product Semantic Differential Scale (CPSS) to measure three product creativity dimensions: 1) novelty, 2) resolution and 3) elaboration and synthesis. White and Smith (2001) have adapted the CPSS to measure advertising creativity and developed a 15 item measure of advertising creativity, which has been further shortened in the study of Ang, Lee and Leong, (2006). These researchers have developed six item measure of advertising creativity; they used two item each to measure three dimensions of advertising creativity i.e. novelty, meaningfulness and connectedness. According to the pre test results, connectedness measure adapted from the study of Ang, Lee and Leong (2006) is suitable in the context of viral advertisement; it uses two items: i) how well the ad connected with their past experience, and ii) the extent to which the ad identified with them. Cronbach ás of the viral advertisements' connectedness ranged from 0.63 to 0.82.

Pre test with academic professionals highlighted the need for more customized measures for novelty and meaningfulness in the context of viral advertisement. Hence, these two measures are developed on the basis of two previous studies (Ang, Lee and Leong 2006; White and Smith 2001); and these measures were refined with the use of Varimax rotation procedure for factor analysis during the pretest. To assess novelty, participants' are asked about their overall impression of the viral advertisement on five items: i) overused-fresh, ii) predictable-novel, iii) usual-unusual, iv) unique-ordinary, and v) original-conventional. The results of factor analysis lead to a two item scale of novelty (overused-fresh and original-conventional); these two items explain 82 percent of total variance. The Cronbach ás for the two-item measure of viral advertisements' novelty range from 0.70 to 0.88.

To assess meaningfulness, participants are asked about their overall impression of the viral advertisement on five items: i) illogical-logical, ii) make sense-do not make sense, iii) convey the respective benefits do not convey respective benefit, iv) relates to the main message-do not relates to the main message, v) relevant –irrelevant. The results of factor analysis led to two item scale of meaningfulness (convey respective benefits-do not convey respective benefits and make sense-do not make sense); these two items explain 86 percent of total variance. The Cronbach ás for the two item measure of viral advertisements' meaningfulness range from 0.60 to 0.71.

Effectiveness of Viral Advertisements

According to the pre test results, the measure of viral advertisement liking is suitable in the context of viral advertisement. This measure is adapted from the study of Till and Baack (2005). It uses five items: i) dislike-like, ii) unfavorable-favorable, iii) negative-positive, iv) inferior-superior, and v) bad-good. Participants are asked about their overall impressions of the viral advertisement on these five items. The Cronbach ás of liking for viral advertisements ranged from 0.66 to 0.82.

For measuring recall, Till and Baack (2005) looked at recall for two different aspects of advertising: commercial feature and brand name. This study focused on recall for only one aspect of viral advertising that is recall for commercial feature, while the brand names are same for all the viral advertisements. For measuring recall, after a week, participants were asked to list down advertisements that they could recall.

Along with traditional measures of recall and liking, an action oriented and web-specific measure-advertising transfer is also used to measure the viral advertisements' effectiveness. Advertising transfers refers to forwarding of the advertisement message to other people. Unlike previous studies (Harrison-Walker 2001; Chiu et al. 2007) that focused on measuring intention to forward, this study focus on actual forwarding behavior of the participants. After a week of sending the viral advertisements, participants are asked about weather they forwarded any of the advertising messages to other people or not. If yes, they are asked to list down advertisements that they have forwarded.

Results

Effectiveness of Award-winning vs. Non Award-winning Viral Advertisements

First research question asks, weather the award-winning viral advertisements are more effective than non award-winning viral advertisements or not. Means and standard deviations for advertisement liking, advertisement recall and advertisement transfer of all four viral advertisements are given in Table-1. To determine the effects of advertising type (award-winning vs. non award-winning) on advertising effectiveness, a one way repeated measures ANOVA statistical analysis is used. The analysis is done to determine the effects of advertising type on three dependent variables, i) advertisement liking, ii) advertisement recall, and iii) advertisement transfer. A separate ANOVA is used to analyze each dependent variable.

Advertisement liking as a dependent variable

When the dependent variable is advertisement liking, a repeated-measure ANOVA is found to be significant, $F(4, 102) = 117.22, p < .001$. This result suggests that there is a significant difference among mean advertisement likings of all four viral advertisements. However, award-winning viral advertisements do not always have higher levels of mean advertisement liking.

For example, as presented in table-1, mean advertisement liking for award-winning advertisement-V2 is significantly less than mean ad liking for non award-winning advertisement-V3. It means award-winning viral advertisements are not always liked more than non award-winning viral advertisements.

Advertisement recall as a dependent variable

When the dependent variable is advertisement recall, a repeated-measure ANOVA is not found to be significant, $F(4, 102) = 1.81, p > 0.1$. This result suggests that there is not a significant difference among mean advertisement recall of all four viral advertisements. There is no significance difference between ad recall of award-winning viral advertisement and non award-winning viral advertisements. It means, award-winning viral

advertisements are not always recalled more than the non award-winning viral advertisements.

Advertisement transfer as a dependent variable

When the dependent variable is advertisement transfer, a repeated-measure ANOVA is not found to be significant, $F(4, 102) = 0.45, p > 0.1$. This result suggests that there is not a significant difference among mean advertisement transfer of all four viral advertisements. There is no significance difference between advertisement transfer of award-winning viral advertisement and non award-winning viral advertisements. It means, award winning viral advertisements are not always forwarded more than the non- award winning viral advertisements.

Table-1 : Effectiveness of Award-winning vs. Non Award-winning Viral Advertisements

Liking	Award Winning Viral Ads.		Non Award Winning Viral Ads	
	V1	V2	V3	V4
Mean	22	19.6	21.2	17.8
Standard deviation	1.9	2.1	1.6	1.7
Ad recall				
Mean	0.57	0.54	0.54	0.42
Standard deviation	0.5	0.49	0.5	0.49
Ad transfer				
Mean	0.39	0.35	0.36	0.32
Standard deviation	0.49	0.47	0.49	0.47

Creativity of Award-winning vs. Non Award-winning Viral Advertisements

Second research question asks whether there is a difference between award-winning and non award-winning viral advertisement in terms of its perceptions about creativity. Means and standard deviations for perception about novelty, meaningfulness and connectedness of all four viral advertisements are given in Table-2. To determine the effects of advertising type (award-winning vs. non award-winning) on the perceptions about advertising creativity, a one way repeated measures ANOVA statistical analysis is done to determine effects of advertising type on perceptions of advertising creativity i.e. novelty, meaningfulness and connectedness. A separate ANOVA is used to analyze each dependent variable.

Novelty as a dependent variable

When perception about novelty of the viral advertisements is a dependent variable, a repeated-measure ANOVA is not found to be significant, $F(4, 102) = 1.54, p > 0.01$. This result suggests that there is not a significant difference among mean novelty of all four viral advertisements. It means award winning viral advertisements are not perceived to be more novel than the non award-winning viral advertisements.

Meaningfulness as a dependent variable

When perception about meaningfulness of the viral advertisements is a dependent variable, A repeated-measure ANOVA is not found to be significant, $F(4, 102) = 3.78, p > 0.01$. This result suggests that there is not a significant difference among mean meaningfulness of all four viral advertisements. It means, award winning viral advertisements are not perceived to be more meaningful than the non award-winning viral advertisements.

Connectedness as a dependent variable

When perception about connectedness of the viral advertisements is a dependent variable, A repeated-measure ANOVA is found to be significant, $F(4, 102) = 96, p < .001$. This result suggests that there is a significant difference among mean connectedness of all four viral advertisements. However, award-winning viral advertisements do not have higher levels of mean connectedness. For example, as shown in table-2, mean connectedness for award-winning advertisements V2 is significantly less than mean connectedness for non-award winning advertisement V3. It means award winning viral advertisements are not always perceived to be more connected than the non-award winning viral advertisements.

Table-2: Creativity Perceptions of Award-winning vs. Non Award-winning Viral Advertisements

Novelty	Award Winning Viral Ads		Non Award Winning Viral Ads	
	V1	V2	V3	V4
Mean	8.8	8.6	8.6	8.6
Standard deviation	1.17	1.21	1.02	1.36
Relevance				
Mean	8.11	7.94	8.03	7.77
Standard deviation	0.72	0.77	0.60	0.59
Connectedness				
Mean	9.2	8.0	9.2	7.0
Standard deviation	1.17	1.10	1.17	1.17

Effects of Creativity on Effectiveness of Viral Advertisements

Third research question asks about effects of creativity perceptions on viral advertisements' effectiveness. Three multiple regression analyses for each of the four viral advertisements i.e 12 regression analyses serve to answer the third research question. Dependent variables

in each of these regression analysis are advertisement liking, advertisement recall and advertisement transfer respectively. Predictor variable in all these cases are participants' perceptions about novelty, meaningfulness and connectedness of the selected viral advertisement. Table-3 provides the results of the multiple regression analyses.

Table - 3 : Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

		Award Winning Viral Advertisements				Non Award Winning Viral Advertisements			
		V1		V2		V3		V4	
DV= Ad liking		β	T-value	β	T-value	β	T-value	β	T-value
IVs	Novelty	0.46	6.0*	-0.07	-2.3	-0.13	-2.0	0.10	2.6
	Relevance	0.17	3.3*	0.52	7.5*	0.31	6.6*	0.01	0.3
	Connectedness	0.43	5.7*	0.52	8.0*	1.1	16.1*	0.92	22.1*
F-value		105*		979*		273*		174*	
R ²		0.77		0.97		0.90		0.85	
Adjusted R ²									
DV= Ad recall		β	T-value	β	T-value	β	T-value	β	T-value
IVs	Novelty	0.64	6.8*	0.62	4.2*	0.26	2.0	0.56	5.8*
	Relevance	0.001	0.01	-0.23	-1.8	0.55	6.2*	0.23	2.6*
	Connectedness	0.17	2.1	0.16	0.92	0.37	2.9*	-0.21	-2.1
F-value		36.6*		17.92		54.25*		14.1*	
R ²		0.54		0.37		0.61		0.31	
Adjusted R ²				0.35					

DV= Ad Transfer		β	T-value	β	T-value	β	T-value	β	T-value
IVs	Novelty	0.37	3.2*	0.49	3.8*	0.63	6.6*	-0.05	-0.5
	Relevance	-0.02	-0.2	0.49	3.6*	0.33	4.1*	0.27	0.3
	Connectedness	0.3	3.0*	-0.1	-0.9	0.001	0.01	0.51	4.9*
F-value		14.4*		39.4*		57.7*		9.9*	
R ²		0.32		0.56		0.65		0.24	
Adjusted R ²									

* p<0.01

Except for one award winning viral advertisement, perceptions about novelty are insignificant in affecting advertisement liking of the viral advertisements. However, these perceptions about novelty positively influence advertisement recall of all four viral advertisements, and significantly and positively affect advertisement transfer of three out of four viral advertisements. Except for one viral advertisement, connectedness does not significantly affect advertisement recall.

The result suggests that the participants' perceptions about meaningfulness and connectedness of the viral advertisements positively influence advertisement liking of all four viral advertisements. When dependent variables are advertisement recall and advertisement transfer effects of meaningfulness and connectedness is mixed and not very clear. For a couple of viral advertisements these effects are positive and significant while in other viral advertisement these effects are insignificant.

Conclusions

Discussions

Our results suggest that award-winning viral advertisements are not significantly more effective than non award winning viral advertisements. Award winning viral advertisements don't have significantly higher levels of advertisement liking, recall or transfer. These results are not surprising, in that earlier, Till and Baack, (2005) have found that in the context of traditional media advertisements, award-winning advertisements are not more effective, more specifically, these advertisements do not enhance brand attitude, aided recall and purchase intention. However, the award winning advertisements facilitated higher unaided recall (Till and Baack 2005). In the traditional media context, award-winning advertisements may be more novel but less meaningful or connected (Ang, Lee and Swang 2006). The higher levels of novelty of the award winning advertisement may be an important reason for facilitating unaided recall. The results of this study are different in suggesting that award winning viral advertisements don't even have higher levels of unaided advertisement recall. Reason for the different finding may be rooted in different nature of viral advertisement. Novelty is an essential element for all viral advertisements irrespective of being award-winning or not. Therefore, award-winning viral advertisements may not necessarily be more novel or better recalled viral advertisements.

Another finding of the study suggests that participants do not perceive award winning advertisements to be significantly more creative than non-award winning advertisements. The participants do not perceive the award winning viral advertisements to be significantly more novel, meaningful and connected than non-award winning viral ads. Therefore, the study supports the argument that creativity awards' judges perceptions of creativity differs from students perceptions of creativity. In the traditional media advertisements, Koslow, Sasser, and Riordan, (2003) also highlighted subjective nature of creativity and found that creativity perceptions differs depending on whom one asks.

Overall, the results of multiple regression analysis indicate that the participants' perceptions about novelty, relevance and connectedness affect effectiveness of the selected viral advertisements and help predict its viral success. Perceptions of connectedness and meaningfulness are more important in affecting viral advertisement liking, while perceptions of novelty is more important in affecting viral advertisement recall, and all three of these variables are important in affecting viral advertisement transfer and viral success. The literature suggests a possible explanation for this difference of effects among different advertisement effectiveness variables. Novelty entails breaking out from a preexisting schema and a fundamental change is made in the existing cognitive structure (Mandler 1982). Being unexpected, advertisements' novelty not only increases the chances of attentive processing but also facilitates the development of the associative memory network and higher levels of recall (Hirschman and Wallendorf 1980). Meaningfulness and connectedness are related to relevant and appropriate advertisement message. The importance of meaningfulness and connectedness is hinted by Miniard, et al. (1991), who distinguished between what they termed relevance (whether a stimulus conveys issue-pertinent information) and appropriateness (what is deemed proper). The latter involves a value-based judgment from a reader regarding the acceptability of the advertisement information. Information that is deemed inappropriate would not connect positively with a reader and vice versa and would not lead to empathetic affective response in terms of advertisement liking. For achieving advertisement transfer an advertisement message need to spark strong emotion-humor, fear, sadness or inspiration, so that consumers forward them for their desire of fun, entertainment and social connections (Phelps et al. 2004). For sparking such strong emotions, the combination of meaningfulness and connectedness must meet novelty.

Managerial Implications

Viral advertisements are not subject to much regulation. The "anything goes" environment of the World Wide Web appears to encourage viral advertisers to create violent and sexually charged content presented in a humorous context without overt branding. Across the board, all industries are using these provocative appeals at equally high levels in their viral advertising. Advertisers are using a lot of ethical or unethical and relevant or irrelevant ways to push an advertisement to go 'viral'. Advertisers are getting more skeptical about importance of creative content of the viral advertisement. At this point of time, this study is important in highlighting importance of creative content of the viral advertisement in driving its effectiveness.

Award-winning and exceptionally novel idea may not be very effective in going 'viral'. It does not mean that creativity of the viral advertisements does not matter, but it means that that the exceptionally novel idea may not be very well connected. Customers' perceptions of creativity are very important in driving effectiveness of the viral advertisements. Hence, more engagement and

involvement of customers in developing advertisement concepts may result in more meaningful and connected viral advertisement. Novelty, meaningfulness and connectedness of an advertisement concept are very crucial to make an advertisement viral. Hence, it is very important not to distort an interesting concept to promote a brand, instead one should promote a novel, meaningful and connected advertisement concept, which is linked to the brand.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study focuses on creativity-effectiveness link only in the context of viral advertisements. Future studies can explore this link in the context of other types of interactive advertisements. The convenience sample of award winning and non award winning viral advertisements examined in this study precludes the generalizability of these results. Future studies should make use of a random sample of award winning and non award winning viral advertisements. Student respondents were employed in this study. Enhanced external validity would be obtained by using more representative samples. This study is a first step towards assessing the link between creativity and effectiveness of interactive advertisements. Future studies can employ more refined measures of each dimensions of advertising creativity. In this study, I focused on only one web-specific measure of advertisement effectiveness i.e. ad transfer. Future studies can employ other web specific measures of advertisement effectiveness like visit to the brand website, duration spent on the website etc.

This study focuses on the effects of creativity of viral advertising idea on its effectiveness. Along with creativity, there can be other factors that affect advertisement effectiveness, for example, advertisement appeals such as sexual, violent, shocking, humorous, and inspiring, specific advertisement themes, types of message, and gender of the audience may also affect advertisement effectiveness. Future studies can explore combined effects of creativity and these others factors on effectiveness of a viral advertisement. Though this study answers some questions about effects of creativity of viral advertisements on its effectiveness, here the focus is on creativity of viral advertisements, not on viral advertising process. Future studies can focus on creativity of viral advertising process. Future experimental designs can investigate effects of different viral advertising processes on its effectiveness of the similar viral advertisements. With increasing importance of viral advertising practices, we need more academic research to explore and grow this important new field.

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Appendix - A

Award Winning Viral Advertisements

Link: V1: <http://www.webchutney.com/virals/udi.html>

Description: This viral advertisement is based on a popular Indian children's game called "Chidiya Udi". In this game, objective is to trick the other players into making all kinds of objects fly - be it people, places or anything inanimate. The name literally means "the bird flies". One player takes the lead in rattling off a list of objects using one's index finger as a representative gesture of flying. The catch is to resist following the leader's action, if the object named does not have the power to fly. In this viral advertisement, however, as the older girl mentions ordinary people and lifts her finger as though they can fly, the small child follows suit. The laundry guy, the gardener, the vegetable vendor along with a bunch of ordinary people can now fly owing to the lowest airfares being offered by Makemytrip.com. While "uda" and "udi" are Hindi translations of the phrase "can fly", "ula" and "uli" mean the same but with a child's lilt. Nikhil, Ashi and Himanshu are other common Indian names.

V2: http://webchutney.com/virals/chalo_lanka.html

This viral advertisement is a sort of sequel of V3; it is based on the epic Ramayana, in which Ravana kidnapped Sita- wife of Ram. Ram won a great war with the mighty Ravana, killed him and rescued his wife Sita. In this viral, there is a new humorous twist to the popular kidnapping incident. The two brothers, Ram and Lakshman along with their faithful sidekick, Hanuman pick the affordable airfares to Sri Lanka by MakeMyTrip to reach Sita instead of the treacherous journey that they undertake in the original epic.

Non Award Winning Viral Advertisements

V3: http://webchutney.com/virals/sita_haran.html

This viral advertisement is the first in series of two; it centered on the Indian festival of Dusshera and titled as "Dusshera canceled". In the epic Ramayana, Ram won the war against Ravana who kidnapped his wife Sita, and thus Dusshera is celebrated across India to mark this victory of good over evil. In this viral, however, Ravana, while on a mission to hoodwink and kidnap Sita encounters the enticing offer from Makemytrip.com and unable to resist it, he rushes off to claim it and drop his plans to kidnap Sita.

V4: http://www.webchutney.com/virals/moving_train.html

This viral advertisement is a humorous take on the popular Indian movie "Sholay" a movie about Dacoits and Bandits. The opening scene has all the filmy drama. Armed dacoits are chasing a train on horseback accompanied by typical action movie soundtrack. After a good chase, the dacoits climb aboard the train and warn the passengers not to move; only to realize a moment later that the compartment is empty. His equally perplexed henchman moans, "there is no one in the train!!!". That very moment the hapless gang sees a plane flying by full of happy passengers. Even as the dacoits stare at the plane, one of them asks, "Kya ab hawai jahaj ko lootiyega ka?" (Will you now loot the airplane?)