



The New Science of Viral Ads

HBR article by **Thales Teixeira**, March 2012

It's the holy grail of digital marketing: commercials that people share. To unlock the secrets of viral advertising, HBS professor Teixeira tracked viewers' eye movements and facial expressions while they watched ads by Coca-Cola, Bud Light, and others. Using the data, he determined solutions to marketers' biggest challenges in the viral ad space.

I applaud the author's attempt to explain the "science" of viral ads, but it isn't a science. It is simply a combination of knowing your audience, understanding the medium, and having the talent to create something

wonderful. People will watch and share great videos. And people recognize greatness when they see it. This is what the advertising business struggles with every single day in all media. When it succeeds, everyone knows about it.

Marc Lichtenstein, director of strategy, The Weinstein Organization

I completely agree with the author that people share these ads because they love to give surprises to others.

Ankit Kedia, senior manager of marketing and operations, SPS Group

I find your point—that people share viral ads because they want to show off, not because they're generous—entirely convincing. Sharing makes the sharer look cool.

David Barnes, e-learning product manager, Packt Publishing

The results say one thing: It's about narcissism. Zero patience. Zero tolerance. I want what I want when and how I want it. Sharing to gain social capital. Narcissism.

Jay Izso, psychological business consultant

These findings overlook two important factors in ad effectiveness: branded recall and conversion. If an ad is liked and passed along but the brand is forgotten or no further action is taken by the viewer, the ad may generate buzz but will do little to build the brand or the business.

Denise Lee Yohn, president and consulting partner, Denise Lee Yohn

I strongly believe that there are no formulas for creating successful viral ads.

Pramil Gupta, senior consultant, PricewaterhouseCoopers



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