

Lesson Plan 4

Understanding Viral Messages

Learn about viral messages and analyze how this form of propaganda activates and relies upon audience participation to complete the communication process.

Rationale

Today, we are not just consumers of advertising – we are active participants in the process of marketing and persuasion. In *viral marketing*, audiences spread and share marketing messages that engage their attention and interest. The consumer therefore does the work of the marketer by using social media to communicate about the product, brand or service.

Essential Question

- How and why do audiences participate in viral marketing and what are the consequences of their actions?

Learning Outcomes & Key Messages

- Recognize the many forms of viral marketing that are now part of contemporary culture
- Practice skills of interpretation and critical analysis
- Consider how audiences are complicit in propaganda when they share it with others
- Consider one's personal identity and social responsibility in deciding what viral messages to share

Preparation

Use a projector to display the [MIND OVER MEDIA](http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com) website. Make copies of Worksheets 4.1 and 4.2 for all students.

Activity 4.1. Viral Marketing is Everywhere

View: **T-Mobile Airport Flash Mob**

<http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/rate/692>

This is a video of a flash mob in an airport. The skillful combination of images, music and dance, plus the sense of discovery or surprise we experience and see in the reactions of the people at the airport, create an intense emotional reaction that is designed to increase visibility for T-Mobile's "Life's for Sharing" campaign. It has been viewed 14 million times since 2010.

Discuss:

- What feelings do you experience when you view this video?
- What circumstances might cause a person to choose to share this particular video on their social networks?
- What are the features of the video that make it share-able?

Activity 4.2. What is Viral Marketing?

These videos take students behind-the-scenes to understand the point of view of the marketer in creating messages designed to influence people's attitudes and behaviors.

View: Viral Marketing Smart

<http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/rate/733>

This is a video produced by a marketing company to brag about its work for SMART USA, a car company. It created an interactive Facebook game that encouraged people to share information about the company with their social networks.

AND

View: IKEA Facebook Showroom

<http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/rate/734>

This is a video produced by a marketing company to brag about its work for IKEA, a furniture company. It created an interactive Facebook competition that encourage people to tag themselves in furniture photos, thereby spreading images of IKEA products to their friends and social contacts.

OR

View: Poop Tweet Case Study

<http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/rate/732>

This is a case study produced by a marketing company responsible for the SMART car account. It created a vital Twitter campaign using bird-poop humor to counteract some negative chat on Twitter about the size and safety of the vehicle. NOTE: Preview before viewing. This content may not be appropriate for all learners.

Discuss:

- What did you learn from watching these videos?
- Have you ever participated in a Facebook game that was a form of marketing or promotion?
- Have you ever shared something on social media that had unexpected consequences?
- What are the pros and cons of users doing the job of marketers?

Key Ideas to Emphasize

Marketers are creative media professionals and use their creativity to the benefit of their clients. In each case, we see specific strategies that are used to encourage users to participate in the marketing process. Users are helping marketers when they participate in these new forms of propaganda.

Activity 4.3 Viral Marketing: What You Need To Know

Students read Worksheet 4.3, which introduces students to concepts and terms of viral marketing. Use these questions to check for comprehension.

Q: How is viral marketing defined?

A: *Viral marketing* is a marketing strategy in which audience participation and interaction is activated to intentionally spread a marketing message.

Q: According to the reading, what makes certain content more likely to be shared widely?

A: In the article, it states that people may be more likely share online media content when it activates strong emotions, including pride, attachment, and empathy as well as negative emotions, including guilt, shame and social anxiety.

Q: Branded flash mobs are not always successful in accomplishing their marketing goals. Why not?

A: In the article, it states that as consumers develop more experience and familiarity with branded flash mobs, this knowledge helps them to recognize and cope with new forms of persuasion.

Activity 4.4. To Share or Not to Share

Working with a partner, students review some propaganda videos at the [MIND OVER MEDIA](http://www.mindovermedia.tv) website and discuss how viral videos activate strong emotions that encourage sharing.

Q: Can you find a video on this website that you would like to share?

Q: Can you find a video on this website that should definitely NOT be shared?

Encourage students to make a list of videos that they would or would not share. After giving them time to work, use large group discussion and ask students to identify their choices and explain their reasoning.

Teacher Reflection

Through examining examples of viral media and marketing, students will be able to understand how these new forms of propaganda use strong emotions and unconventional content to activate and engage users. We aren't paid by marketers to participate in the marketing process, though. We choose to do it freely because it may be pleasurable or give us status among our social networks. We should "think before we share." Fortunately, people do not need to be victims of viral marketing: people actively analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember new forms of persuasion and they can use coping tactics to resist these messages. Awareness of advertising and sales tactics can help people become critical consumers of viral marketing. It's essential that people become socially responsible for their online sharing.

Evaluation

Students should be able state that viral marketing is more sharable when it activates strong emotions. Strong emotions may short-circuit critical thinking. They should be able to define viral marketing as branded messages that are shared by users with their social networks. They should be able to select videos that they believe their peers would find valuable and important; they should also be able to identify others they may be dangerous to share widely and offer reasons to support their opinions.