

Viral Marketing: What You Need to Know

4.3

Instructions: Read and discuss the article and answer the questions below.

By Renee Hobbs and Kaylen Shimoda

When Smart USA wanted to increase young people's awareness of their new little car, they created an online game that enabled users to "tag your own adventure" by voting on what should happen next in an animated story. The game was fun to play – and as people played, they shared their experience, generating 36 million impressions in just six months, helping to increase people's awareness of the car company.

Viral marketing is a marketing strategy in which audience participation and interaction is activated to intentionally spread a marketing message. Viral marketing works by getting people to activate their social networks. People naturally desire to share meaningful content and stay up-to-date on what's popular.



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. The term 'viral marketing' was popularized by media critic Douglas Rushkoff who in 1994 book, *Media Virus*, observed that people like to share viral media as an excuse to engage socially and intellectually with each other.

Branded Flash Mobs

In order to get people to share branded content, marketers use their creativity to come up with new ways of engaging people and increasing visibility for products and services. A flash mob occurs when a large group of people simultaneously assembles in a public area, do something unusual, and then leave the scene. Though the concept first started out as a social experiment, corporations have started using it for their own marketing initiatives. T-Mobile's "Life's for Sharing" campaign have featured branded flash mobs in public places. But as consumers develop more experience and familiarity with branded flash mobs, they may begin to critically analyze them. People can actively analyze, interpret, and evaluate new forms of persuasion and they can use coping tactics to resist these messages.

To Share or Not To Share

Working with a partner, review some propaganda videos at the [Mind Over Media website](http://www.mindovermedia.tv) and discuss how viral videos activate strong emotions that may inspire and encourage sharing.

Can you find a video on this website that you would like to share? Which one? Why?

Can you find a video on this website that should definitely NOT be shared? Which one? Why not?