FROM CAUSE TO CLICK: MODELING USER ENGAGEMENT WITH CAUSE-RELATED VIRAL ADVERTISEMENTS

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From Cause to Click: Modeling User Engagement with Cause-Related Viral Advertisements

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this entire work to my supervisor, Professor Harish Chaudhry, without whom nothing would have been possible. He gave me a chance with this Ph.D., and it changed my life for good. I am forever grateful to him. I also dedicate this work to my mom and dad, who have always supported me through thick and thin and have encouraged me to excel to greater heights.

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **"From Cause to Click: Modeling User Engagement with Cause-Related Viral Advertisements"** being submitted by **Mr. Shashank Shaurya Dubey** to the **Indian Institute of Technology Delhi** for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** is a *Bonafide* record of the research work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance. The thesis work, in my opinion, has reached the requisite standard, fulfilling the requirements of the said degree. The results contained in the thesis have not been submitted, in part or in full, to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.



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No man is an island,
Entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.

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Abstract

As digital marketing evolves, brands are increasingly leveraging cause-related viral marketing to engage a growing crop of socially conscious consumers. However, the mechanisms through which users engage with such cause-related viral advertisements remain theoretically underexplored and empirically fragmented. This study addresses these gaps through a three-study mixed-methods design—integrating grounded theory, survey-based structural modelling, and personality segmentation—to uncover nuances in user engagement with cause-related viral ads.

Study 1 adopts a constructivist grounded theory approach, analyzing twenty in-depth interviews to develop a qualitative framework of engagement. Findings reveal two broad clusters of antecedents—affect-based drivers (emotional identification, creativity, informativeness) and value-based drivers (brand–cause fit, normative alignment)—that shape engagement via the mediators of awe and message authenticity. These insights are organized into an integrated framework grounded in the Narrative Transportation Theory, Dual-Process Theory of Persuasion, and Moral Identity Activation and Value Congruence Theory.

Study 2 empirically tests and validates this qualitative framework using a structured online survey (N = 467) featuring three pre-tested cause-related viral ads. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) supports the reliability and construct validity of the scales, while Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) confirms the hypothesized relationships. Results demonstrate that awe and message authenticity act as critical mediators linking emotional, cognitive, and normative antecedents to intent to engage.

Study 3 introduces a personality segmentation layer using K-means clustering on Big Five trait scores. Three distinct user profiles emerge, and cluster-specific PLS-SEM uncovers significant heterogeneity in engagement pathways across these clusters. This highlights the role of psychographic profiles in influencing engagement with cause-related viral content.

This research makes contributions to the viral marketing, cause advertising, and personality literature. Theoretically, the study integrates emotional, cognitive, and normative pathways into an integrated framework using a multi-theoretical lens. Methodologically, the study uses a unique mixed-methods approach by combining grounded theory with structural modelling and clustering by k-means that lends the study theoretical depth and nuanced insights. Managerially, our study provides actionable insights to marketing and creative managers on the dos and don’ts of crafting potentially viral cause-based advertisements.

सार

जैसे-जैसे डिडजटल मार्केडटिंग डिर्कडसत हो रही है, ब्ाि्ंि सामाडजर्क रूप से जागरूर्क उपभोक्ताओं र्की बढ़ती सिंख्या र्को आर्कडषित र्करने र्के डलए र्कारण-सिंबिंडित ि्ायरल मार्केडटिंग र्का तेजी से लाभ उठा रहे हैं। हालाँडर्क, डजन तिंत्ोि्ं र्के माध्यम से उपयोगर्कताि ऐसे र्कारण-सिंबिंडित ि्ायरल डिज्ञापनोि्ं से जुड़ते हैं, ि्े सैद्ाि्ंडतर्क रूप से र्कम खोजे गए हैं और अनुभिजन्य रूप से खिंडित हैं। यह अध्ययन तीन-अध्ययन डमडित-डिडियोि्ं र्के डिजाइन र्के माध्यम से इन अिंतरालोि्ं र्को सिंबोडित र्करता है - ग्राउिंि्ेि डसद्ाि्ंत, सिक्षण-आिाररत सिंरचनात्मर्क मॉि्डलिंग और व्यक्तक्तत्व डिभाजन र्को एर्कीर्कृत र्करना - र्कारण-सिंबिंडित

ि्ायरल डिज्ञापनोि्ं र्के साथ उपयोगर्कताि जुड़ाि र्की बारीडर्कयोि्ं र्को उजागर र्करने र्के डलए।

अध्ययन 1 एर्क रचनाि्ादी ग्राउिं ि्ेि डसद्ाि्ंत दृडिर्कोण र्को अपनाता है, जो जुड़ाि र्का एर्क गुणात्मर्क ढाि्ंचा डिर्कडसत र्करने र्के डलए बीस गहन साक्षात्कारोि्ं र्का डिश्लेषण र्करता है। डनष्कषि पूि्ि्ृत्त र्के दो व्यापर्क समूहोि्ं र्को प्रर्कट र्करते हैं - प्रभाि-आिाररत चालर्क (भाि्नात्मर्क पहचान, रचनात्मर्कता, सूचनात्मर्कता) और मूल्य-आिाररत चालर्क (ब्ाि्ंि-र्कारण डिट, मानर्क सिंरेखण) इन अिंतदृि्डियोि्ं र्को र्कथात्मर्क परिहन डसद्ाि्ंत, अनुनय र्के द्वि-प्रडिया डसद्ाि्ंत, और नैडतर्क पहचान सडियण एिि्ं मूल्य अनुरूपता डसद्ाि्ंत पर आिाररत एर्क एर्कीर्कृत ढाँचे में व्यिक्तित डर्कया गया है।

अध्ययन 2, तीन पूि्ि-परीडक्षत र्कारण-सिंबिंडित ि्ायरल डिज्ञापनोि्ं ि्ाले एर्क सिंरडचत ऑनलाइन सिक्षण (N = 467) र्का उपयोग र्करर्के इस गुणात्मर्क ढाँचे र्का अनुभिजन्य परीक्षण और सत्यापन र्करता है। पुडिर्कारर्क र्कारर्क डिश्लेषण (CFA) पैमानोि्ं र्की डिश्वसनीयता और रचनात्मर्क ि्ैि्ता र्का समथिन र्करता है, जबडर्क आिंडिर्क न्यूनतम ि्गि सिंरचनात्मर्क समीर्करण मॉि्डलिंग (PLS-SEM) पररर्कक्तित सिंबिंि्ोि्ं र्की पुडि र्करता है। पररणाम प्रदडि्त र्करते हैं डर्क डिस्मय और सिंदे्ि र्की प्रामाडणर्कता भाि्नात्मर्क, सिंज्ञानात्मर्क और मानर्क पूि्ि्ृत्त र्को सिंलग्नता र्के इरादे से जोड़ने ि्ाले महत्वपूणि मध्योि्ं र्के रूप में र्कायि र्करते हैं।

अध्ययन 3, डबग ि◌ाइि डिि◌ेषता स्कोर पर K-मीन्स क्लस्टररिं ग र्का उपयोग र्करके एर्क व्यक्तक्तत्व डिभाजन परत प्रस्तुत र्करता है। तीन अलग-अलग उपयोगर्कताि प्रोफाइल उभरती हैं, और क्लस्टर-डिडिि PLS- SEM इन क्लस्टरोि◌ं में सिंलग्नता मागों में महत्वपूणि डिडि◌िता र्को उजागर र्करता है। यह र्कारण-सिंबिंडित ि◌ायरल सामग्री र्के साथ जुड़ाि र्को प्रभाडित र्करने में मनोग्राडिर्क प्रोि◌ाइल र्की भूडमर्का पर प्रर्काि ि◌ालता है।

यह ि◌ोि ि◌ायरल मार्केडटिंग, र्कारण डिज्ञापन और व्यक्तक्तत्व साडहत्य में योगदान देता है। सैद्◌ाि◌ंडतर्क रूप से, यह अध्ययन भाि◌नात्मर्क, सिंज्ञानात्मर्क और मानर्क मागों र्को एर्क बहु-सैद्◌ाि◌ंडतर्क दृडिर्कोण र्का उपयोग र्करके एर्क एर्कीर्कृत ढाँचे में एर्कीर्कृत र्करता है। पद्डतगत रूप से, यह अध्ययन ग्राउिंि◌ि थ्योरी र्को सिंरचनात्मर्क मॉि◌डलिंग और र्के -मीन्स द्वारा क्लस्टररिं ग र्के साथ जोड़र्कर एर्क अडद्वतीय डमडित-पद्डत दृडिर्कोण र्का उपयोग र्करता है जो अध्ययन र्को सैद्◌ाि◌ंडतर्क गहराई और सूक्ष्म अिंतदृि◌ि प्रदान र्करता है। प्रबिंि◌र्कीय रूप से, हमारा अध्ययन मार्केडटिंग और रचनात्मर्क प्रबिंि◌र्कोि◌ं र्को सिंभाडित रूप से ि◌ायरल र्कारण-आिाररत डिज्ञापन तैयार र्करने र्के डलए क्या र्करें और क्या न र्करें, इस पर र्कारि ि◌ाई योग्य अिंतदृि◌ि प्रदान र्करता है।

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ACRONYM INDEX

AC: Ad Creativity

AI: Ad Informativeness

EI: Emotional Identification with Ad Characters

AW: Awe

BCF: Brand Cause Fit

NA: Normative Alignment

MA: Message Authenticity

EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis

CFA: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

GT: Grounded Theory

SEM: Structural Equation Modelling

ELM: Elaboration Likelihood Model

SNS: Social Networking Sites

UGT: Uses and Gratifications Theory

VM: Viral Marketing

WOM: Word-of-Mouth

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