VIRAL MARKETING FOR NONPROFITS: A STUDY
OF THE ALS ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE
AND KONY 2012 CAMPAIGN

by

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AND KONY 2012 CAMPAIGN

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ABSTRACT

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and KONY 2012 video campaigns exemplify the extensive amounts of potential that social media marketing can bring to a nonprofit organization. This study explores various elements of social media marketing in the nonprofit context, including factors that influence charitable giving, the social network effect, and the spread of viral content. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and KONY 2012 videos are then analyzed according to a framework of virality, mapping out the specific drivers that lead to each campaign’s success. Through this analysis, nonprofits can gain a better understanding of the benefits of social media marketing and the different elements that drive a viral campaign.
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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Pete Frates, a former Boston College baseball player, was diagnosed with ALS (commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease). In July of 2014, Frates posted a video to his Facebook page nominating friends, family, former teammates, professional athletes, and celebrities to take on the “Ice Bucket Challenge.” Within four days, the challenge went viral, spreading across the globe at unprecedented speeds. Since then, over 28-million people have joined in on the conversation about the Ice Bucket Challenge. On Facebook alone, there were more than 17-million videos shared with over 10-billion views (“The Ice Bucket Challenge,” 2014). Since Frates’ July post, the Ice Bucket Challenge has contributed to over 100 million dollars worth of donations to the ALS Association (Pallotta, 2014).

Around the same time that Pete Frates was diagnosed with ALS, an organization called The Invisible Children was producing a video in an attempt to create public awareness about the atrocities of guerilla warfare in Sudan. The video explains that the Ugandan warlord, Joseph Kony, was kidnapping children to fight for his guerilla army. The “KONY 2012” video was released on March 5, 2012 and subsequently was viewed over 112-million times within the span of one week. The sudden success of the KONY 2012 campaign was unexpected because of its political theme and its long length, finishing at just under 30 minutes (Bal, Archer-Brown, Robson, & Hall, 2013). So why did the video go viral? Why was the campaign so successful? And how can nonprofits replicate this success to facilitate social change and carry out their mission?

Over the past three decades, competition within the nonprofit sector has significantly increased as the number of nonprofit organizations increase and the amount
of charitable funding decreases (Levine & Zahradnik, 2012). In an attempt to compete for the limited amount of funds available, nonprofit organizations are looking for more creative ways to differentiate themselves and promote awareness. In turn, many nonprofits have refocused their attention towards more commercialized and creative methods of marketing in order to engage and connect with present and potential stakeholders (Pope, Isely, Asamoa-Tuto, 2009).

The use of social media has become an increasingly effective marketing tool for nonprofit organizations. According to Fussell-Sisco and McCorkindale (2013), social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have drastically changed how organizations communicate with the public. When implemented properly, social media has the power to spread messages and information on a viral level. As society moves out of the “information age” and into the “connected age” (Fine, 2006), nonprofits and their supporters have the potential to facilitate change with the simple click of a button.

This study will analyze the changing conditions and emerging marketing strategies within the nonprofit sector. The research will explore the factors influencing charitable giving and identify the potential predictors of people who are likely to give to charitable causes. The study will then go on to analyze the increasing importance of social media marketing in the nonprofit sector and discuss the potential benefits and challenges of using social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Building upon the concept of the “social network effect,” the study will explore viral marketing and the various factors that drive the spread of viral content. The study will conclude by analyzing the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and KONY 2012 campaigns and identifying the specific drivers that lead to their sudden success.
LITERATURE REVIEW

A Changing Market and Emerging Strategies

Through the combination of social, economic, and political changes in the United States, the demand for nonprofit services has increased while the funding to nonprofit organizations (NPOs) has decreased (Levine & Zahradnik, 2012). Even so, the nonprofit sector has continued to grow over the past three decades. With this growth comes intense pressure to compete for the limited amounts of available funds, leading many NPOs to refocus their business efforts on marketing strategies aimed at connecting with present and potential stakeholders (Pope, Isely, Asamo-Tuto, 2009).

It wasn’t until the late 1960s and early 1970s that NPOs began to recognize marketing as an essential business function within the organization. Early marketing efforts consisted solely of traditional promotional tactics to raise funds. Over time, NPOs began to adopt more commercial marketing strategies in an attempt to replicate the success of marketing efforts by for-profit companies, which were typically focused on the bottom-line (Stride & Lee, 2007). After recognizing the disconnect between the original, traditional marketing strategies and the needs of the organization (Pope et al., 2009), NPOs began to focus their marketing efforts on engaging target audiences and promoting organizational awareness. Now, in addition to traditional marketing strategies, NPOs are utilizing more commercial strategies, such as social media marketing (Levine & Zahradnik, 2012).

Factors Influencing Charitable Giving

The 2008 and 2009 recession created a massive demand for nonprofit services. Despite the increasing need for nonprofit donations, charitable giving dropped by 13.5%
between 2007 and 2009 (USA Giving 2009, 2009). Philanthropists often use social exchange theory to explain what motivates or hinders people from giving to charitable causes. Social exchange theory supports the idea that no charitable gift or act is purely for the sake or care of others. Instead, all charitable acts (such as volunteering or donating) are a two-way exchange motivated by the benefits to the giver and beneficiary of the charitable act (Blau, 1986). Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) studied over 500 articles on charitable giving to identify the specific motivational factors that lead people to donate money to charitable organizations. The study found the following eight mechanisms to be the driving forces behind charitable giving: awareness of need, solicitation (being asked to give), costs and benefits (such as tax benefits), altruism (acting for the sake of others), reputation or social status, psychological benefits (such as the “joy of giving” or maintaining a positive self-image), personal values, and efficacy (the idea that your donation will “make a difference”).

Further building upon these past studies, Marx and Carter (2014) identified potential predictors of charitable giving including race, sex, income, volunteer experience, location of residence, household size, tax status, workplace giving options, household wealth, religious affiliations, education level, home ownership, employment status, marital status, and computer ownership. They then examined how these various factors affected charitable giving across four categories of human service organizations. The study found that other than wealth, computer ownership was the most significant predictor of charitable giving across three of the four service categories. These findings indicate the growing influence of personal computers and online promotion through Internet sites and social networks.
Social Media Marketing

As the use of personal computers and online promotion becomes increasingly influential to the success of nonprofit organizations, so does the use of social media as a marketing tool. For any organization looking to increase awareness, fundraising, and stakeholder engagement, social media marketing is no longer optional (Fine, 2011). The ability to interact through digital tools such as web sites or personal electronic devices has lead society out of the “information age” and into the “connected age” (Fine, 2006). Digital tools allow us to connect with one another, influence communities, and bring about social change. Power is taken away from the institution and put into the hands of the individual. People now have the ability to go online and express their views while connecting with people who share similar interests or concerns. This dissemination of power allows for activists to become more involved in generating social change. For this reason, the most effective NPOs use social media sites as a means of facilitating social-change efforts rather than controlling them (Fine, 2006).

Engaging in social media provides organizations with new and creative ways of approaching fundraising, organizing, and advocacy. Unfortunately, many NPOs fail to use social media sites to their full potential. Campbell, Lambright, & Wells (2014) studied the social media use of NPOs in New York State and found that most organizations lacked a long-term social media strategy as well as a clear understanding of the potential value of engaging in two-way conversation with social media users. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) further studied this concept by analyzing the content of the twitter accounts of the largest NPOs in the US. They found that the most effective organizations were using Twitter as a strategic tool to interact and engage stakeholders in dialogic, two-
way conversations. Lovejoy and Saxton then created a “hierarchy of engagement” (p. 349) by categorizing the various tweets of the NPOs according to the function of the content: information, community, and action. “Information” tweets (which made up 59% of the total content analyzed) were used to provide general information about the organization and its activities. “Community” tweets (26% of total content) focused on interaction and relationship building. “Action” tweets (15% of total content) engaged users by actually encouraging them or asking them to act, in some way, on behalf of the organization. The study found that the most successful NPOs were the ones frequently engaging with users through “community” and “action” tweets.

The use of two-way communication on social media can also be a very effective way of enhancing the organization’s authenticity, transparency, and credibility. According to Fussell-Sisco and McCorkindale (2013), transparency is the extent to which an organization is open with the community. According to Kang (2010), credibility involves the perceived trustworthiness of the source as well as the accuracy of the information the source is providing. When an organization focuses on enhancing both transparency and credibility, the public perceives them to be more authentic. Fortunately for NPOs, communication via social media has become a very effective way of enhancing both transparency and credibility. Moreover, Fussell-Sisco and McCorkindale (2013) found that social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter had profound effects on the public’s perceptions of the organization’s authenticity. Organizations with the most activity and consistency on social media sites were seen to be more transparent and credible. In fact, Kang (2010) found credibility to be “one of the key factors driving the traffic of individuals to organizations’ social media” (p. 20). The more authentic an
organization appeared, the more likely they were able to appeal to a larger target audience.

While social networking is on the rise, the state of traditional advertising is under intense pressure. According to recent research from *Marketing Week* (“How brands overcome,” 2012), people are feeling increasingly bombarded by the constant stream of commercial messages in day-to-day life. In turn, people are left with a sense of fatigue and wariness. Consumers are now more likely to respond to digital methods of communication, making social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube the most effective means of marketing to a desired target audience. Unlike traditional advertising methods, such as print ads, social media takes the average advertising campaign to the next level. Organizations now have the potential to instantly engage in conversation and jump straight into shifting attitudes and possibly even behavior.

**Social Media Sites**

By definition, social media is “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009, p.61). The most widely used social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (*Social Networking*, 2014). This study will focus on the use of social media marketing on these three sites.

Facebook has over 864 million daily active users (Facebook Newsroom, 2014). The Facebook site allows organizations to develop relationships by posting pictures, videos, hyperlinks, and audio files in addition to commenting on or sending a direct message to an individual user or an organizational page. Of the three social networks being studied, Facebook is the most effective site for providing disclosure to the public.
As was mentioned earlier, people expect organizations to be open and transparent with their supporters. Nevertheless, NPOs continue to misuse organizational pages, failing to see their operational potential. For example, Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas (2009) found that most organizations lacked the proper planning and research required to “enhance information dissemination and involvement strategies” (p. 106) on Facebook. The only way to effectively build relationships with present and future stakeholders is through careful planning, strategy, and research.

Twitter is a “micro-blogging” application that limits users to posting 140 characters or less per post (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Twitter allows for rapid dissemination and exchange of information by limiting the size of the message that is posted (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Although there are limited capabilities on Twitter, the application actually holds the most potential for use by NPOs because information must be “easily digestible” (Lovejoy et al., 2012, p. 313). Communicators are required to be creative with their messages in order to bypass character restrictions through hyperlinks, hashtags, retweets, tweet frequency, and following behavior. In return, NPOs are only limited by the imagination of the communicator (Lovejoy et al., 2012).

YouTube is a video-sharing application on which organizations can share videos to inform and educate viewers about their cause (Waters & Jones, 2011). An increasing number of NPOs are using YouTube to post videos that entertain users in addition to informing them. In a 2011 study of the top 100 NPO YouTube channels, Waters and Jones found that NPOs were failing to use YouTube to its full potential. Even so, there have been several outlying examples of incredibly effective uses of videos to promote a cause. The KONY 2012 video, for example, was viewed over 112-million times within
the span of one week (Bal, Archer-Brown, Robson, & Hall, 2013). The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge utilized the video-sharing capabilities of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to promote the cause. The sudden success of both of these campaigns can be explained by the “social network effect” as well as several other factors contributing to the viral spread of online content.

The Social Network Effect

According to Saxton and Wang (2013), the *social network effect* is the concept of reaching expanding and exponential circles of followers or supporters through the networks of the organization’s already-established follower-base. After further studying this concept, Saxton and Wang found that the size of an organization’s network is directly related to the receipt of charitable donations. A similar study by Levine and Zhradnik (2012) found a positive relationship between large amounts of online presence and improved financial capability. Both of these studies suggest that organizations that use social media sites effectively and frequently are more likely to experience financial success. Furthermore, Saxton and Wang (2013) found that NPOs in certain fields were far more likely to succeed with social media fundraisers than others. Health-related causes, for example, tend to be more successful because they reflect the general public’s need for help. As social media sites become more prevalent, NPOs have the opportunity to facilitate new and creative ways of raising money. In fact, some of the most successful social media fundraisers of all time used the social network effect to their advantage by disseminating viral content (typically videos) to their supporters and their expanding networks of friends (Bal, Archer-Brown, Robson, & Hall, 2012).
Creating Buzz and Going Viral

Viral marketing is the process of spreading information and messages though social media like a virus (Botha & Reyneke, 2013). Once a piece of information or message goes viral, it has the potential to reach exponential amounts of people at unprecedented speeds. Some researchers understand viral marketing to be a technologically enhanced form of word-of-mouth marketing (Shirky, 2000; Phelps et al., 2004). Ferguson (2008) contends that viral marketing leads to word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM), suggesting that the two marketing phenomena have a cause and effect relationship. Mills (2012, p. 163) defines viral marketing as “the strategic release or seeding of branded content into the socially networked online consumer ecosystem, followed by the potentially multiplicative spread of the content through the ecosystem as hosts (consumers) receive the content and are motivated to share the branded content with other consumers.” The remainder of this study will use viral marketing in terms of Mills’ definition.

Social media supports and facilitates the spread of viral content, but what drives people to share viral content with others? Hausmann (2012) suggests that the generation of “buzz” or virality requires certain preconditions or driving factors. The most common notions as to why people share information over social media involve the idea that people like to: entertain others, inform others, help others, generate reciprocity (relating to social-exchange theory), or boost reputation (Berger & Milkman, 2012). As viral content and viral marketing become increasingly influential throughout social networks, researchers have set out to find the driving forces or principles to explain exactly what leads to the viral spread of content and messages.
The SPIN Framework

According to Mills’ (2012) SPIN framework, there are four key factors driving the spread of viral content: spreadability, propagativity, integration, and nexus (See Appendix A). Spreadability can be analyzed according to two dimensions: likeability—the extent to which the consumer is stimulated or engaged emotionally or intellectually—and shareability—the extent to which the consumer expects others to perceive the content in a similar way. Essentially, spreadability addresses the who and the why by exploring how shareable the content is from the perspective of the sender, and how likeable the content is from the perspective of the recipient. Propagativity is the how or the ease with which consumers are able to share content with others. This is dependent upon the ease and speed of transmission (how much effort is required to share?), the size and type of the network (how many people are readily accessible to receive the content?), the richness of the content being transmitted (is it clear or high-quality?), and the proximity of the “share button” to the actual content. Integration is a stage within the viral marketing process in which the content is simultaneously spread across a variety of media platforms both online (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and offline (i.e. traditional media such as TV and radio). Nexus is simply the sequential follow up in a viral campaign. Mills argues that the SPIN framework is only a loose model of mapping the drivers of virality, and that more research is required to understand what leads people to share content online.

Principles of Contagiousness

In 2013, Jonah Berger developed a new framework of “contagiousness,” explaining why particular concepts and content catch on. Berger’s framework
distinguishes six principles of contagiousness, represented by the acronym STEPPS: *social currency*, *triggers*, *emotions*, *public*, *practical value*, and *stories* (See Appendix B). According to Berger’s framework, “ideas that contain *social currency* and are *triggered*, *emotional*, *public*, *practically valued*, and communicated as a *story*” (2013, p. 25) are far more likely to be talked about and shared. In terms of *social currency*, Berger argues that we share things that make us look good or appear a certain way and therefore it’s important to create content that help people achieve their desired impression. *Triggers* are the “stimuli that prompt people to think about related things” (Berger, 2013, p. 23). This is an important element of contagion because it argues that if there is some form of environmental reminder or cue for a particular concept or idea, it will keep people engaged and talking about it. The *emotion* principle of Berger’s framework essentially encapsulates the idea that “when we care, we share” (Berger, 2013, p.23). An earlier study by Berger and Milkman (2012) further explores this concept by suggesting that virality is partially driven by physiological arousal or the activation of emotion. Content that evokes high-arousal emotions, be they positive (i.e. awe or amazement) or negative (i.e. fear, anger, anxiety), is far more likely to go viral than content evoking low-arousal or deactivating emotions. The *public* principle argues that the more publicly visible something is, the easier it is for it to be imitated or talked about. The principle of *practical value* suggests that people like to pass along useful information. The final principle, *stories*, supports that idea that people think in terms of narratives, and therefore information is most easily understood and spread when it is communicated as a story (Berger, 2013).
Regardless of what drives people to share viral content, viral marketing can greatly benefit organizational communications in terms of reach, speed, and cost. Once content goes viral, it can spread to an exponential amount of people in a small amount of time at virtually no cost. When considering the benefits of virality and the social network effect, organizations looking to facilitate social change have the potential to gain a lot. With the power of virality comes the power to shape, influence, and shift public opinion (Botha & Reyneke, 2013). While it’s not often that a social campaign goes truly viral, every now and then a campaign comes along that takes the world by storm. Examples like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and Kony 2012 video prove that there is significant value in social media marketing for nonprofits.

**METHODOLOGY & RESULTS**

**Overview**

In order to better understand the potential benefits of social media marketing to a NPO and the factors that contribute to a successful social media campaign, this study will analyze two specific cases in which NPOs have experienced exceptional amounts of success from the viral spread of social media content: the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and the KONY 2012 video. Each case was chosen according to the criteria defined below:

- Distribution and spread of campaign aligns with Mills’ definition of *viral marketing*: “the strategic release or seeding of branded content into the socially networked online consumer ecosystem, followed by the potentially multiplicative spread of the content through the ecosystem as hosts (consumers) receive the
content and are motivated to share the branded content with other consumers” (2012, p. 163).

- Campaign was communicated and shared across multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.
- The supported cause had relatively low levels of awareness before the implementation of the campaign. During and after the campaign, awareness significantly increased.
- The success of the campaign was unexpected, reaching far beyond what the organization had anticipated.
- The campaign generated an unprecedented amount of revenue for the cause.
- The campaign garnered a significant amount of media attention.

**Framework of Virality**

The cases will be analyzed according to a framework that combines both Mills’ SPIN framework (See Appendix A) and Berger’s principles of contagiousness (See Appendix B). For the purposes of the study the *spreadability* factor (including the dimensions of likability—the degree to which you like the content—and spreadability—the degree to which you think others will feel the same way) will be replaced by the “contagiousness” factor, made up of the six dimensions or principles from Berger’s framework. The new framework is mapped out in the figure on the next page.
ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

Overview

After Pete Frates, the former Boston College baseball player, was diagnosed with ALS in 2012, he and his family were determined to find a cure. In July of 2014, Pete posted to his Facebook page to nominate his closest friends, family members, former teammates, and more to take part in what would become the “Ice Bucket Challenge.” Within four days, the challenge had spread all throughout Boston and the surrounding areas. In the weeks that followed, the challenge would spread across the US (See Appendix C) and beyond, reaching nearly every country across the globe (“The Ice Bucket Challenge,” 2014).

The challenge was simple: either dump a bucket of ice water over your head or donate to the cause. Once an individual was nominated to take the challenge, they had 24 hours to either accept or donate and nominate three other friends to take on the challenge. Between the time that Pete Frates posted his video and September 1st, there were over 17 million videos related to the Ice Bucket Challenge shared on Facebook alone. These videos were viewed over 10 billion times by more than 440 million people. Over 28
million people engaged in the Ice Bucket Challenge conversations (i.e. posted, liked, or commented), including a large number of celebrities. Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, Chris Pratt, and Cristiano Ronaldo were among the most viewed and talked about posts on Facebook (“The Ice Bucket Challenge,” 2014). By mid-August the Ice Bucket Challenge hit record levels of social engagement, garnering immeasurable amounts of media attention and generating over $100 million worth of donations to the ALS Association (Pallotta, 2014).

**Drivers of Virality**

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge possessed all four drivers of virality. In terms of *contagiousness*, the Ice Bucket Challenge provided viewers and sharers with a message that provided social currency and was triggered, emotional, public, practically valued, and communicated as a story. When consumers shared their own videos or engaged with others’ content involving the Ice Bucket Challenge, they created an impression that they were a good person because they cared about a good cause (finding a cure for ALS). The challenge also unified participants under one movement and provided a sense of “street credibility” for all those taking part in it (Olenski, 2014). Various environmental stimuli such as trending hashtags (#ALS, #StrikeOutALS #ALSIceBucketChallenge) and the stream of ice bucket videos on a Facebook wall acted as triggers to remind consumers of the campaign and its cause. Depending on the videos that were shared, the Ice Bucket Challenge campaign evoked a wide range of emotions. Some videos were funny and light-hearted, while others were sad or inspiring. Once the campaign caught speed, the Ice Bucket Challenge was very publicly visible, from social media feeds to TV coverage. The movement also provided a practical value to the world’s population by addressing
the fact that there is no known cure for ALS and that people needed to do something about it. Finally, the Ice Bucket Challenge told a story of hope and perseverance, as Pete Frates and the rest of the world fought to find a cure for ALS.

In terms of propagativity, the Ice Bucket Challenge was very easily shared across various social networks. As personal electronic devices and social media platforms become increasingly integrated, consumers are finding it easier to share, post, or engage in content on social media. With the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, consumers could quickly post personal videos from their smart phones or share videos across multiple platforms. While Facebook was the most actively engaged network during the Ice Bucket Challenge, consumers had the freedom to post on whichever platform they wished. In terms of content richness, the quality of the videos or conversation varied amongst consumers. Nevertheless, the most viewed and talked about videos (often distributed by celebrities) were high quality and well produced. And finally, the intuitive layout of social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube ensured that the content and videos were always well within reach of the share button (See Appendix D).

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was centered around the spread of nominations via video, which meant that individual content was easily integrated across multiple platforms, both online and offline. The campaign took advantage of the social network effect by capitalizing on participant’s existing friendships and networks. The social media platforms that attracted and engaged the most sharers and viewers included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Once the campaign garnered enough attention, it was also integrated into television through news coverage on cable shows such as The Today Show and The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. Finally, because the spread of the
Ice Bucket Challenge was driven by the sequential follow up of nominated participants, the entirety of the campaign was essentially driven by *nexus*.

**KONY 2012 Campaign**

*Overview*

In March of 2012, Invisible Children released their own video, titled “KONY 2012.” The video, running just under 30 minutes, was a call to action against Joseph Kony, the leader of the Ugandan guerilla group “Lord’s Resistance Army.” It tells the story of Joseph Kony and the crimes he has committed as a warlord, including kidnapping children in Sudan to become a part of his army. The campaign called upon the young people of the world to come together and “make him famous” so that Joseph Kony and his guerilla army could be stopped. Despite its long length and political theme, the video was viewed over 112-million times within the span of one week (Bal, Archer-Brown, Robson, & Hall, 2013). The video was released both on YouTube and the organization’s own website, and was shared through a variety of social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. KONY 2012 quickly grabbed the attention of Twitter users when popular celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Justin Bieber, and Rihanna began to share the video with their millions of Twitter followers. The video alone brought 1.7 million visitors to the Invisible Children Facebook page, 95% of which were new visitors (Baker, 2012).

*Drivers of Virality*

As was the case with the Ice Bucket Challenge, the KONY 2012 video was driven by all four factors of virality, including the six principles of *contagiousness*. Sharing the
video was a form of social currency because it allowed people to portray an aspect of their personality that showed they cared about the KONY 2012 mission. The campaign also unified participants, especially those among younger generations, under one common cause, making them feel like they were a part of something bigger (Marquis & Walsh, 2012). Triggers such as trending hashtags (#stopKONY, #makehimfamous, #KONY2012) and KONY 2012 paraphernalia (See Appendix E) continuously reminded people of the campaign and it’s overall objective. The video evoked a range of emotions including anger, fear, and empowerment to stop Kony. The campaign was highly publicized throughout all social media feeds and media exposure, including coverage in The New York Times, Washington Post, and cable television (Marquis & Walsh, 2012). It provided practical value in the sense that it was important for one to know and understand the conditions in Sudan so that people could find a way to fix the issue. And finally, the video told a story of good versus evil, in which a Ugandan warlord was taken down by a unified group of people seeking justice for the crimes he committed.

The KONY 2012 video was easily shareable across all platforms, giving the campaign large amounts of propagativity. Again, as social media sites make it easier to share content across multiple platforms (i.e. sharing a Facebook post through Twitter), content such as the KONY 2012 video is easily and quickly transmitted to others. The sharer of content also has the option to spread the content on whichever network they chose. In the case of the KONY 2012 campaign, the video was most often shared on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Baker, 2012). Additionally, the video was well-produced and high quality, giving viewers more of a reason to share it. And once again,
because social media sites are aiming to make their platforms as easy to navigate as possible, share buttons were always well within reach (See Appendix F).

The video was highly integrated across all platforms that are capable of sharing videos, particularly YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Once the campaign garnered the attention of the media, it was also quickly integrated into more traditional forms of media, such as TV and radio coverage. Finally, the campaign was given nexus with the successive reinforcement of a follow up video, titled “KONY 2012: Beyond Famous.”

**DISCUSSION**

**ALS Ice Bucket Challenge**

There were a number of exceptionally well-designed drivers that lead to the success of the Ice Bucket Challenge campaign. First, it was fun. The concept of seeing your friends dumping a bucket of ice on their heads and the impending shock that followed was entertaining. Though it was benefitting a serious cause, the spirit of the campaign was light-hearted. Second, the 24-hour deadline provided a sense of immediacy. Participants who were willing to abide by the cutoff helped to facilitate the rapid spread of the campaign. Finally, the use of a nomination system further enhanced the social network effect by requiring participants to nominate three additional friends from their existing networks. The multiplicative nature of the challenge contributed to the expansive shareability of the campaign.

**KONY 2012 Campaign**

One of the most standout elements of the KONY 2012 campaign was the organization’s ability to turn the issue itself (Joseph Kony) into the brand. By focusing
every aspect of the campaign on the problem at hand, the KONY 2012 campaign was able to clearly and effectively communicate the campaign’s purpose. In addition to providing focus, the campaign was also emotionally impactful. The narrative portrayed in the KONY 2012 video was more than just a story about Joseph Kony—it was a story about you. The video immediately captured viewers’ attention with its opening line: “The next 27 minutes are an experiment, but in order for it to work, you have to pay attention.” The video then proceeds to expose the atrocities of Joseph Kony’s crimes and explain just how viewers can help to stop him. The final driver of success in the KONY 2012 campaign was the video’s ability to empower the viewer. The video is quick to communicate the amount of influence that social media users have in today’s age and encourages participants to take advantage of that power to do “great things.”

**IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the results of these case studies there are a number of key takeaways that nonprofits should consider when looking to market via social media or implement a viral social media campaign. Both the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and the KONY 2012 video were the first campaigns of their kind—each one unique in its own right. It’s important to consider that consumers are hard to impress the second time around. For this reason, aspiring nonprofits should not attempt to replicate the form of these past campaigns, but rather the functions of their driving forces.

It’s also important to note that despite the endless opportunities that social media marketing can provide a nonprofit, there are considerable challenges and threats that accompany the spread of a viral campaign. Social media takes power away from an
organization and puts it into the hands of the general public (Mills, 2012), leaving marketing managers with very few ways of controlling what is said about the organization in the public arena. Any type of viral content—be it a positive reflection of the organization or a negative one—can have a lasting impact on the brand. While the KONY 2012 video was an exemplary case in facilitating social change with viral content, the sustainability of the campaign was short lived. Quickly after the video went viral, Invisible Children came under scrutiny for misrepresenting key facts in the video and being dishonest about how the organization and its mission was funded. A few weeks later, the film’s creator, Jason Russell, was arrested for public indecency. The incident, which was later claimed to be a “mental breakdown” from too much media pressure, was filmed by onlookers and sold to gossip website TMZ.com. While the KONY campaign did achieve its mission of making Kony famous, Invisible Children quickly lost credibility from the incident. During the months following the release of the TMZ video, Invisible Children fought to get the public back on their side and to refocus social media users back on their original mission.

The downfall of the KONY 2012 campaign is a cautionary tale of what nonprofit organizations should expect once a campaign has gone viral. Because the majority of nonprofit campaigns seek to raise money for a specific cause, participants and benefactors want to ensure that their donations are put towards what the organization actually claims they will be spent on. In the case of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, participants expected all donations to go towards research for finding a cure for ALS. Once a particular campaign has garnered enough attention, it’s almost inevitable that media outlets will investigate the organization’s background and business model on
behalf of the general public. For this reason, organizations looking to appeal to a large audience should learn from the mistakes of the KONY 2012 campaign and be prepared for the attention and scrutiny that follows when a nonprofit organization communicates to the masses.

Organizations seeking to disseminate their own viral messages should design content that engages and unifies participants using the combined framework of virality. Both the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and KONY 2012 campaigns possessed contagiousness, propagativity, integration, and nexus, in addition to some aspect of first-time uniqueness that drove people to unify under a common mission or cause. The KONY 2012 video, for example, encouraged a union of social media users looking to use their power for good. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge created a community of people seeking to raise money and awareness in a fun and entertaining way that people wanted to take part in. Organizations who are looking to create their own Ice Bucket Challenge or distribute a video with lasting impact need to remember that past campaigns can’t be replicated. Instead they should be dissected and analyzed according to their driving forces so that other organizations can push their own campaigns in a unique and different way that will appeal to, engage, and unify audiences.

CONCLUSION

As society moves out of the “information age” and into the “connected age,” social media marketing has become increasingly important and essential for nonprofit organizations looking to distinguish themselves and compete for the limited amount of funds available. According to the social exchange theory, there are a number of factors.
leading individuals to give to a charitable cause. Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) expanded upon this theory to find that aside from wealth, computer ownership was one of the biggest predictors of charitable giving. As computer use and social networking becomes gradually more ingrained in today’s culture, nonprofits have the opportunity to take advantage of existing social networks in order facilitate social change. By capitalizing on the social network effect and adhering to the drivers of virality set out by Mills’ (2012) SPIN framework and Berger’s (2013) principles of contagiousness, nonprofits can create viral marketing campaigns designed to reach unprecedented amounts of people. Recent viral campaigns such as the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and the KONY 2012 video exemplify the potential drivers of success and accompanying challenges that viral marketing can bring to a nonprofit organization and its mission.
APPENDICES

Appendix A – SPIN Framework (Mills, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPREADABILITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likeability</td>
<td>Sharability</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPAGATIVITY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transmission speed</td>
<td>Network size/type</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTEGRATION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Offline</td>
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</table>

NEXUS

Appendix B - Principles of “Contagiousness” (Berger, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Currency</th>
<th>Triggers</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Practical Value</td>
<td>Stories</td>
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Appendix C – Spread of ALS Ice Bucket Challenge Across the US
Appendix D – Shareability of Facebook Videos - Bill Gate’s Ice Bucket Challenge

Bill Gates
Mark Zuckerberg challenged me to dump a bucket of ice water on my head to raise awareness for ALS.

I'm always up for a challenge.

Now I'm passing it on to On Air with Ryan Seacrest, Chris Anderson from TED, and Elon Musk. You have 24 hours…

Like · Comment · Share · August 15, 2014

Bill Gates and 962,367 others like this.

263,169 shares
Appendix E – KONY 2012 Paraphernalia
Appendix F – Shareability of KONY 2012 YouTube Page
REFERENCES


