

Effects of “Yawning” Infection and Spread of Rumors in Mass and Interpersonal Communication in the Information Society

Vladimir Sychenkov
Kazan Federal University, Remliovskayastr, 18, 420008 Kazan, Russian

Abstract: Paying attention to the phenomenal speed of propagation of rumors which is similar to the flu epidemic, the researcher considers the nature of socio-psychological phenomenon of “Word of Mouth” (WM). From the research point of view it seems promising to move from the conservative perception of “WM” as “secondary” and negative information to consideration of “WM” as an object of scientific research which is already being studied in sociology, psychology and communication theory. The paradigm in science is being changed with the main emphasis on influence transfer rather than information transfer. Of all the effects of infection, the rumors and yawning are considered. The researcher refers the yawning infection to the symptom of unconscious differentiation of the audiences into “own-alien” ones by the subject so to provide spontaneous influence or to avoid further communication.

Keywords: “Word of mouth”, viral marketing, viral videos, effects of mass media, rumors, mass communications, infection, influence, interpersonal communication

INTRODUCTION

Traditional media is losing credibility: Reality is openly constructed through news content on the Russian TV. There are practically no attempts of impartial analysis. The interest of the audience to the “word of mouth” as almost the only source of alternative information (except for the Internet) is increasing on this background. With all the disadvantages that are traditionally put forward against the “popular rumor” it is obvious that the word of mouth is mostly criticized by the discredited in the eyes of the audience today’s journalism which fulfills the function of the society here, rejecting the “absurd rumors” and exposing people behind them.

In this regard from the research point of view it seems promising to move from the conservative perception of “WM” as “secondary” and negative information to consideration of “WM” as an object of scientific research which is already being studied in sociology, psychology and communication theory. After all with rare exception, the rumors and the newest methods of their study and interpretation remain undervalued.

Thus, taking into account that each individual rumor has its newsworthy information, logic and structure and it plays some social role and carries some hidden “message” it should be recognized that “the glass is half full”. Noteworthy is the phenomenal velocity of propagation of rumors which is caused by the wide availability of communication and interpretation of information to any social stratum (what modern MC should learn from).

So in modern terms, the “word of mouth” should be considered as a means of expressing (rather than forming) public opinion. According to McLuhan, the communication channel is a message.

Studying folks’ talks: The “word of mouth” is traditionally understood as unplanned and unmanaged interpersonal communication (from mouth to mouth).

In some contrast to that the viral marketing which declares the possibility of “off-site” management of “P2P” communication (Kietzmann and Canhoto, 2013) is discussed. So is that true? Do we really understand the nature of media viruses?

According to “advertising research” magazine, despite growing investments of many brands into MM, 75% of all consumer talk about brands face-to-face, 15% talk over the phone and only 10% online. It is proved by Keller Fay’s studies (Bodo and Ken, 2013).

So, we can see there are two prevailing trends. The first one is the re-assessment of viral marketing (there is no understanding why the virus is spreading there is no versatility, creativity for creativity). The second is under estimation of the word of mouth (there is no control on the go, natural distortion, the risk of a boomerang).

It is important to move on and look at the background against which the word of mouth works. The information society is hypocritical. This is neither good nor bad; this is a fact that must be taken into consideration. Formal peace and struggle for spheres of influence are the logic and the driving force of the information society.

The information society is characterized by the state of information warfare: there are very few resources on the planet and ... a lot of people. The "war" is the natural way of survival. If you possess information you rule the world.

The war is run on two fronts the material (seizure of territories and resources) one and information (explanation of the occupation to the society as the only right solution). Thus, today one cannot win only on the one front. In the information society the victory on two fronts at once is needed.

We should be careful speaking about information warfare. Here we don't mean the information warfare in its broad definition as confrontation between state propaganda machines.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mini-information wars: We are talking about mini information wars constantly run between corporations and companies, leaders and subordinates, fathers and sons, women and men. These wars never stop in the world, in every country, every city, company and family. This is because the major benefit is the influence (it is noteworthy that in Latin there is the word "influentia" which is used both for influence and influenza virus).

The "virus" means "poison, poisonous beginning" in Latin. Until the late 19th century, the term "virus" was used in medicine in reference to any infectious agent that causes the disease.

People began to speak about viral marketing at the end of the 20th century when it was formed from the related communication discipline-marketing as opposed to the "word of mouth".

According to Wikipedia, under the viral marketing today we understand two things:

- Marketing technique that uses existing social networks (Internet) to raise awareness of the brand/product/service
- Methodological principles used in e-Marketing and based on motivating the individual to transfer the marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth impact of the message

There is also one more understanding of viral marketing which is too often forgotten as of a strategy in which the idea, product or service affect the person in the way that he gets "infected" by the idea of specific content distribution and becomes an active repeater.

If we assume that mini-info wars are the background of the information society what is then by Gestalt, its figure? In the information society, the figure and the main

criterion of information efficiency is the index of its citation, circulation in the society. Thus, you can hardly find any psychologist in Russia who did not criticize Freud for his "outdated theory" but the citation indices of "full-fledged" psychologists and Freud differ markedly.

That is why it is important to understand how the audience is "turned on" for two things: reception of a particular message and "transmitting" it to new recipients.

Transmission of influence rather than information:

In the classical scheme of impact on the audience, the recipients of the information are perceived as semi-passive participants in the communication who can at the most, call live TV or radio programs to express their opposition to something (or adjourned write an indignant letter).

However, we are familiar with the theory of Paul Lazarsfeld who expanded one-stage model of communication (mass media-recipient) to the two-stage one (mass media-opinion leaders-recipients) (Lazarsfeld, 1976). It was him to change paradigm with the main emphasis on influence transfer rather than information transfer. He was the first to make the conclusion about the priority of interpersonal communication over mass communication when trying to persuade mass audience in something.

Lazarsfeld in some sense anticipated the current boom of viral marketing by providing academicians and practical people with foundation which they unfortunately ignored. Anyway, it is obvious that the communication effectiveness is within the limits of understanding of how the person perceives information he needs (out of scope offered daily) and why in most cases he throws away official information targeted at him and in some cases he suddenly becomes an active channel of communication, infecting others with the idea.

In marketing practice, like in medicine, the virus uses any favorable opportunity to increase the number of messages transferred. "The favorable opportunity" means that the virus does not penetrate anywhere except where it is "awaited." Thus, the flu virus finds two conflicting parts in the body that are "tearing" it into pieces at the moment. For a person it is a struggle of rationality and emotions. In a situation when the struggle escalates (for example, a person spends more time at work because he feels bad at home) one of the parties rashly opens the door for the Trojan horse of influenza.

Flu gives a clue: The virus finds a cell suitable for its replication, contacting specific receptors on the cell surface by separate parts of its capsid (or outer shell) with the "key-lock" type of interaction. If specific

(“learning”) receptors on the cell surface are absent, the cell is not sensitive to viral infection: the virus does not penetrate into it.

According to Wikipedia, the essence of viral marketing is the same-users voluntarily transfer messages containing desired information because they are interesting for them. The problem is how to make ordered information “interesting” for the end users. According to Wikipedia, “viral marketing uses the habit of people to share information with others.”

We want to clarify that it is not “habit” but “a need”; not “to share information” with everyone but “to communicate” with those who understand you and who you want to make a certain impression on. And how can one person impress another? With the help of special, belonging only to him, exclusive information.

Traditionally, it has been thought that people choose from the information flow what seems interesting or useful for them. In some experiments, we observe the opposite a person actively perceives messages that he can “privatize” (interpret) and ignores those that work on “foreign” interests. We have identified that as the law “of small information-privatization wars.”

In fact, all this is about natural daily information speculations of any person. In modern researches little attention is paid to the possibility of information speculation on a product or a service (after a purchase) in front of other people. Meanwhile in addition to the material aspect, a person “privatizes” the purchase informationally in his own eyes. So, people go to the concerts of M. Zadornov (Russian satirical writer and performer) for decades because there they can “privatize” the idea that the world is full of stupidity but the Russians are at least not the most stupid in it (the subject of privatization is national self-assertion).

Where speculations originate from: the subject of privatization is an implicit idea allowing a person to turn from the object of influence into the subject of influence from being part of the crowd or a supporting actor into an active participant or the main character. The subject of privatization allows the audience to get the resource for implementing its ambitions. Privatizing, it and the status, people become active communication channels in the promotion of ideas, goods or services.

Information is the data organized in the way it becomes helpful for the audience. According to Bentley, the signs of quality information are: relevance (correspondence of the response to the request); reliability; robustness (ability of information to be out-of-date for long). We would add here another sign which is “information belonging” (i.e. if it belongs to somebody or not).

“Independent information” (the one that has not been privatized by anybody) becomes development resource in the information society. Every second people look around and try to find what they can “privatize” ideologically, something that helps them to stand out from everyday life.

There is an anecdote about propaganda in the Soviet Union: “our patients are the healthiest in the world, our dwarfs are the tallest” (an attempt of privatization of everything in the world). An example of nagging of an old person: “tomato juice used to be redder, salt-altier, sugar-sweeter” (an attempt of privatization of the moments of his youth).

We can find examples of “privatization” of information in classical literature. Two genius of all times and nations, Leo Tolstoy and William Shakespeare, represent two approaches in processing messages. The first one masterfully describes details in his novel, leaving no room for privatization; the second makes the reader his co-author that is why theater and movie remakes of Tolstoy and Shakespeare are different in number by a factor of hundreds.

“Shakespeare writes the play then he invites actors and says: guys here’ the story, let’s develop it into the show. Let’s think big: put the stick on the stage write on one plate “Forest” on the other “Castle”. Let the audience be creative and imaginative. Tolstoy does not like this idea for sure. But thousands of stage directors are happy when they can develop Shakespeare’s ideas and transform them into their own”.

Recently Western technology has been implemented at the regional Russian TV. According to it, the secret of a successful TV program is to show in the evening news something that people will talk about tomorrow. But let’s go deeper: “Who will talk and who to?”

A person “privatizes” only TV information that he can transform in his own way and tell the others so to make an impression that was planned consciously or unconsciously.

RESULTS

Looking not for a woman but for a message: At his time, the purchase of “Chelsea” saved millions of dollars on advertising and PR world wide for R. Abramovich. The fact turned to be so much “nobody’s” that crowds of journalists and politicians rushed to privatize it. British newspapers in were hyping up the thesis of “the Russians coming...”, “in the Russian Federation they lamented that sports industry was losing money. After a time, a surge of interest in the English championship was observed in Russia as the Russian fans began to consider it their home championship, “Chelsea” club-their “own club”).

Some of the known Russian public names are mediaviruses. For example, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy who seems to have been psyched out. But for some reason he is still invited to various TV programs. The subject of privatization works: the viewers assert themselves on the background of the hero. Impression of a "one hour clown" is deceptive, though.

According to E. Toffler wars of the agrarian period were fought for territories of the industrial period for means of production. Wars of the information age are fought for means of processing information/knowledge. In the war of the third wave, imagination is as important as information. "A rocket hits a tank and imagination hits power." Just ask a veteran of the first information war (from the history of conflicts in akids' sandbox).

Several years ago we organized PR-support of the opening of the International equestrian center "Kazan". The objective was to switch the population from the old racetrack to the new one to attract to the horserace new viewers who preferred other popular games (hockey, basketball, football, etc.). Racing for the prize of the President of Russia was helpful as we came up with the subject of "privatization": our horses were the most "horseful" in the world and they were the favorites of the tournament. Krasnodar, Tatar, Kazakh, Turkmen, Ukrainian, French and English horses were "ours" turn by turn. We placed this information in the network and it was reprinted by dozens of major sites and portals in Russia and abroad.

So as a result of small information-privatization war for 1.5 weeks there were organized >70 reprints on the Internet, approximately 20 opinion pieces in traditional media and there were published 15 our own news on the website of the International equestrian center.

In the end, journalists were so much interested in who would become the favorite of the race that they began to develop this topic on their own and eventually were entrapped themselves and confused the audience so that they had to check their predictions by coming to the right place for us.

Practice has shown that we have found a platform for more conscious work of the professionals in different communication environments. The model of small information-privatization wars has proved to be an effective way of promoting ideas, using the effects of infection of the audience. The mechanics was simple. The project provides an opportunity for the target audience to get the resource for their own ambitions realization. The audience, capitalizing this resource and getting some status, becomes a channel to promote the project.

DISCUSSION

I am reading-I am yawning: While studying the effects of infection in interpersonal communication the phenomenon of infection yawning came in view. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language of Vladimir Dahl to yawn means "to open mouth with a sigh, with stretching out because of being bored or languor". Yawning is traditionally attributed to symptoms of fatigue or drowsiness but recent studies have proven that it is not true. Yawning can indicate both on fatigue (national saying "one yawns on the ceiling, the other on the wall and the third on the bed") and on attention focusing (one yawns to get more attentive).

Thus, scientists have proven that after being warmed up to a certain critical temperature, the brain begins to function worse. A mouth during yawning is playing a role of "the fan", supplying a body with the cool air from outside. This helps blood cooling and at the same time cools the brain.

However, studying the problem of yawning, we are interested in something else, namely, tremendous ability of yawning to affect the other person/people nearby. Observations show that about half of those who see people yawning on TV or catch a yawn on the phone or listen to the conversation about yawning, involuntarily seek to "join". Why?

Researchers have received several explanations. The two most common of them are the "primitive" reflex (Hesse *et al.*, 2005) and "empathy". In accordance with the first version, a reflex developed during the evolution. When the ancestors of modern humans lived in herds, probably, yawning was a means to synchronize the behavior of the members of the herd. Yawning transmitted from person to person could be used as a signal: time for bed or time to hunt.

According to the second version, only those people, who have better developed area of the brain responsible for empathy, yawn in response. It was found out experimentally by American psychologists. Researches of British scientists and their Japanese colleagues who were studying kids' reaction to the yawning of the others, prove the same. The reaction of both healthy children and patients with autism was studied. It was found that healthy children were yawning in response to yawning of the others and autistic children weren't.

So, we can see that yawning in response is merely a response to human emotions, a kind of empathy for him. Consequently, yawning infectiousness is connected to empathy.

Why then people yawn at the same time? Is it because once they had to go to bed at the same time? Or is it because we need to share emotions of the others? But one version does not contradict another.

We share views while yawning: The yawning response as a reflex developed when it was vital for people. The reflex development was possible because of some part of the brain that is responsible for empathy. And who could the primitive man empathize with as not a member of his herd?

Here, we will venture our own hypothesis. Both camps of researchers are right but their findings should be developed to the core. Yawning infection on a subconscious level allows a person to determine who is in front of him “friend” or “foe”. If it is a friend, the yawn is supported, relationship is established, both can relax and talk from heart to heart. If it is someone else there will be only one person yawning and his yawn will mean: “you make me sleepy” or “I’m in the state when I can’t perceive what you’re saying” that is an indication on condition incompatible with normal communication. It naturally leads to interruption of communication.

In this connection, it is curious to study a case of “forgetting infection” when one person tries to influence another but forgets important details of the past. However, since the contact has been already made, the person passes his communication partner not the information itself but only the state of “freezing” (similar to yawning) and the other person instinctively understands what he is talking about but he cannot transfer information verbally and is only able to pass “forgetting” on.

Thus, the yawning infection is the symptom of unconscious differentiation of the audiences “friend or foe” by the subject in order to provide spontaneous effect (to share rumors) or to avoid further communication (only official information and exaggerated courtesy).

Our hypothesis is on the same page with the increasingly popular “neural-mirror reaction,” under which yawning occurs easily as imitative reflex (and only yawning of humans and chimpanzees evokes response

reaction). With a little refinement not everything is imitated (imitation is not copying of behavior) and not in front of everyone (friend or foe).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the interrelationship between the rumors and yawning infection effects. Yawning is pre-communicative, recognition to identify agents of influence. The rumor operates like a channel to transfer influence rather than information so that the person who has already become our “friend” could use a rumor of his own free choice, influencing on his own channels of communication and disregarding the others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

REFERENCES

- Bodo, L. and H. Ken, 2013. Word of mouth: What we know and what we have yet to learn. *J. Consum. Satisfaction Dissatisfaction Complaining Behav.*, 26: 1-18.
- Hesse, M.D., K.E. Stephan, M. Saarela, K. Zilles, R. Hari and G.R. Fink, 2005. Yearning to yawn: The neural basis of contagious yawning. *NeuroImage*, 2: 1260-1264.
- Kietzmam, J.H. and A. Canhoto, 2013. Bittersweet understanding and managing electronic word of mouth. *J. Public Affairs*, 13: 146-159.
- Lazarsfeld, P., 1976. *The Uses of Sociology*. Basic Books Publishers, New York, USA., Pages: 314.