

Buzz Marketing as a new practice of digital advertising: A Study Case on Scarlett Whitening brand

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Abstract. Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM) has been used for a long time and is still called the most effective marketing strategy. When many traditional-manual concepts have been displaced due to changes to the digital era, the emergence of the internet has actually added to the effectiveness of this marketing strategy. By adopting the concept of WOM into digital marketing, a profession was born as well as being considered a new advertising medium called a buzzer that carries out buzz marketing activities (the term WOM in the world of digital marketing). Using case study methodology, this research discusses the effectiveness of buzzer as a new digital advertising model, using the buzz marketing strategy that has been used by the Scarlett Whitening brand. Buzzers are different from influencers and key opinion leaders (KOL) because buzzers are generally ordinary personal accounts or spam accounts that have no personal branding and reputation to be at stake. The use of buzzers is considered the right choice to increase brand awareness.

Keywords. Word of Mouth, Buzzer Effectiveness, Brand Awareness, Digital Advertising, Marketing Strategy.

1. Introduction

In experiencing something, good or bad, there is often a desire to share it with others. This phenomenon caused the term “Word of Mouth” to emerge. According to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), Word of Mouth (WOM) is the act of someone sharing something interesting with someone else and passing the information, whether done face-to-face, via telephone, e-mail, social media, or through other intermediary media [1]. In the early 1970s, a psychologist named George Silverman pioneered a marketing strategy based on the WOM phenomenon called Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM) [2]. Although it is one of the oldest marketing and advertising strategies, WOM is still considered to have high effectiveness in promotional activities. Many believe that WOM has great power to influence perceptions and persuade target audiences. It is because communication between consumers has a strong influence on the decision process for purchasing goods and services, as well as on the formation of consumer behavior. When many traditional-manual concepts have shifted their existence due to changes to the digital era, another case with WOM. The advent of the internet has actually added to the effectiveness of this marketing strategy. By adopting the WOM concept, a profession was born as well as a new advertising mode called buzzer.

The word buzzer refers to the people doing buzz marketing. Buzzer is an English word that means bell or alarm, while in Oxford Dictionaries, buzzer is defined as an electrical device that makes a buzzing sound and is used for signaling. It is used for certain signals or signs [3]. Buzzers are paid by the owner of the business or by an advertising agency to buzz about the product or service so that they can be known and talked about by people before finally enter the minds of the target audience. These buzzers are usually contracted with the buzzing frequency that has been set by the brand. In its development, there are also buzzers who willingly become buzzer out of their satisfaction of product or service they used.

Buzz marketing began to be used by brands for promotional purposes in 2012. The use of this strategy can help to increase the interaction of the seller's or event organizer's account with their audience, which is often known as customer engagement. Customer engagement is very important because the more involved one achieves, the more likely it is for the product or brand to be remembered by consumers. It would have an impact on increasing sales. The high engagement of online stores also represents that they have a good relationship with their customers or followers. That way, online stores will find it easier to find out information about the wants and needs of their customers through interactions on social media [4]. Apart from engagement, continuous messaging by buzzers also supports brand awareness.

One of the brands that have used the buzz marketing strategy is Scarlett Whitening. Aside from influencers, this brand also uses a massive number of buzzers to increase brand awareness. The peak point was in 2020 when Scarlett Whitening products skyrocketed and went viral on several social media platforms, such as Tiktok, Twitter, and Instagram courtesy of the buzz marketing strategy they implemented. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of the buzz marketing for digital advertising. It is hoped that from this research, interesting information about buzzers and buzz marketing strategy can be found and applied as innovations in digital advertising.

2. Method

This research was structured using the case study method. Case study is a scientific activity carried out intensively on a problem studied from various surrounding phenomena; it can be social, political, cultural; linked to institutions or individuals; and so on, in order to get a critical and in-depth understanding of the problem being studied. The information collected in the case studies comes from the real life of the researchers, without the need for engineering or testing on the object of research [5]. The steps for case study research include:

1. Selection of research topics or themes,
2. Study of research theory,
3. Formulation of the problem,
4. Data collection,
5. Processing and data analysis, and
6. Conclusions and Research Results Report.

3. Brand Awareness, Word of Mouth and Buzzer in Digital Marketing

The earliest stage of consumer buying is *Awareness*. At this stage, people will be aware of the business offered through uploaded content. This stage is very important because it is a key to unlock the next stages. The social media content will greatly affect the building of brand awareness among consumers because they tend to use social media every day, so the likelihood of people seeing uploaded content is very high. Meanwhile, Charleswoth states that the company's online presence aims to increase brand awareness and trust in order to complement its offline efforts [6]. Chaffey and Ellis say that marketing with the concept of content is recommended as the most effective online marketing approach [6].

Effective content is believed to stimulate demand without actually selling; building trust, and a positive brand image. Thus, brand awareness in digital marketing can be used as the first step so that consumers know the products offered, as well as the initial goal of digital marketing.

Although it is the most traditional and ancient way of marketing, word of mouth is the most effective form of marketing [7]. The Euro RSCG firm has proven that the use of WOM is ten times more effective than TV or print advertising. There are two types of WOM information dissemination methods:

1. Organic word of mouth, namely WOM that occurs naturally when consumers are satisfied with a product or service and have a desire to share their support and enthusiasm.
2. Amplified word of mouth, namely WOM that occurs by design by the company using campaigns to accelerate WOM in consumers.

Today, peer-to-peer conversation among customers is the most effective form of promotion. As customers trust their peers more, the best source of influence is the customer group turning into advocates. WOM is considered a trustworthy communication channel because it started with customers who have consumed a company's products or services and obtained satisfaction, thus recommended it to others [9]. Huba and McConnell state that the willingness of consumers to tell a product to others (doing WOM) is the third of five sign sequences that indicate consumer loyalty [10].

Buzz marketing is a term that refers to WOM techniques that have been influenced by information technology. In the past, WOM was spread through direct interpersonal interactions, but now it is replaced by interaction via social media. In other words, buzz marketing is an old product that uses new packaging [11]. Hughes in his book *Buzzmarketing: Get People to Talk About Your Stuff* defines buzz marketing as a way to attract the attention of consumers and the media to the point where talking about the brand or company he runs becomes entertaining, interesting, and newsworthy [7]. Simply put, buzz starts a conversation.

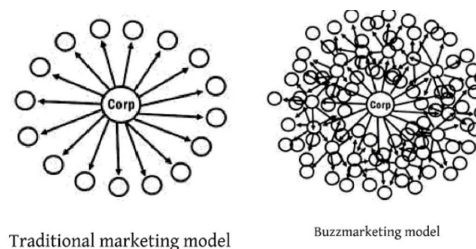


Figure 1. Comparative visualization of how traditional and buzz marketing models work
(Source: *Buzzmarketing: Get People to Talk About Your Stuff* by Mark Hughes)

Buzz marketing creates brand awareness by making the product a hot topic for many people because of its good reputation. Conventional marketing methods and buzz marketing start in the same way, namely by sending messages to consumers. The difference is in buzz marketing the message received does not stop at the first audience but spreads to people around, then continues farther and farther. To make one audience to tell another, there must be a “topic” to talk about. A product will only get attention from the public if the product is buzzworthy or worthy of being recommended to others. One of the steps to create a buzz effect, companies must provide information that makes consumers want to disseminate it. Messages should be contained in words that are easy to share, original, and useful.

Social media users can be categorized into three categories: followers, buzzers, and influencers [12]. Buzzer is defined as a social media account that at any time disseminates, campaigns, and buzzes messages with the aim of emphasizing those messages into public opinion. Buzzer works by providing information or promoting something multiple times so that it is widely discussed by many people. Buzzers are considered successful if they are able to make a particular topic or product trending, therefore

it attracts attention and is discussed widely. Buzzers often manage more than one social media accounts or use massive amounts of fake accounts, controlled by humans or robots, to boost the message spread. The characteristics of buzzers that hum a topic over and over result in the audience tended to avoid them, but that doesn't mean the audience loses their sense of interest in things that are being promoted. The audience may conduct research to find out what the buzzer is actually talking about, therefore the buzzer is more suitable to be used to increase brand awareness [13].

Having similarities in spreading messages to a wider audience, in practice the terms buzzer, influencer, and key opinion leader (KOL) are still overlapping. During the research process, the characteristics of influencers and KOL were often found in buzzer definition. Therefore, it is necessary to provide clear boundaries as to which social media users can be categorized as buzzers, KOLs, or influencers. Buzzer comes from the word buzz which means buzzing, hearsay, or rumor. Per this definition, a buzzer is indeed assigned with disseminating a series or part of information repeatedly to reach a wider audience [14]. The keyword that needs to be highlighted here is "repetitive", so that the buzzer advantage is in the number of messages (quantity), not the quality of the messages. Buzzers focus on the intensity or frequency of repeating "tweets" about related topics. Buzzers don't have to convince their followers. Their job is only to convey as much information as possible without thinking about whether the followers will be interested or not. Buzzers are only responsible for making his followers aware of the information they keep on providing.

Buzzer usually refers to a group of people whose identity is unclear, has ideological or economic motives behind it, then disseminates information. Buzzer accounts generally don't have a reputation to be staked. According to Enda, influencers have real names and clear backgrounds. Influencer means a person who can influence, especially able to lead the audience's opinion. Unlike buzzer, an influencer needs to gain trust and have special skills to convince his followers. Influencers generally have personal branding. A brand that uses influencer services can be considered as a kind of collaboration. To achieve effective results, the brand must sort and select influencers with the image that matches the message of the product being offered [15].

The difference between key opinion leader (KOL) and influencer is that KOLs are someone expert in a certain field, whose opinion is considered valid because they have a background in the fields. KOL is not only active on social media, even some are more focused on real-world activities. However, it is also possible that KOL is active in one social media, for example, YouTube or other platforms. Because of the accountability, KOL's opinion can influence audiences who trust them. Thus, the identities of influencers and KOL have similarities in terms of reputation and credibility, the difference is that KOL has an understanding or educational background in the field they are talking about. On Xendit.co [16] it is described some of the differences between buzzers and influencers/KOLs, which can be seen in the following table.

Table 1 Buzzer & Influencer Differences

Buzzer	Influencer
It is not certain to have a lot of followers because it is not a public figure.	Is a public figure so that he has a lot of followers (thousands to millions).
Providing information or promoting something many times so that it becomes viral or trending (focusing on the quantity of messages).	The resulting content is usually in more detail, such as explaining the advantages of a product, how to use the product, or why followers should buy the product. Promotion can only be done once or twice (with a focus on message quality).
Work in a team.	Work alone through his personal social media accounts.
Buzzers often manage more than one social media account to achieve a goal.	Prioritizing someone whose character matches the brand and having an influence on target consumers.
The pattern of repetitive information dissemination makes the audience tend to avoid buzzers so that the engagement rate tends to be low. However, your audience will probably do some research to find out what the buzzer is really talking about.	Engagement rates are usually much higher due to more personal communication patterns

The indicator of success is to make a certain topic or product trending or viral so that it attracts attention and is discussed by many people.	The indicator of success is the product being promoted is generating high conversions.
The main focus of buzzer is to reach more people, so it is suitable for increasing brand awareness.	Focus on getting followers to do something (usually a product purchase or subscription).
Examples of buzzers on social media are accounts that don't have personal branding or don't have a certain quality for others to believe. A buzzer account is generally an ordinary person, reseller, or anonymous account.	Some examples of influencers on social media are Sandra Dewi, Reza Oktavian, Rachel Venny, Shirin Al Athrus, and Jovial da Lopez. While some examples of KOL are Kak Seto, Chef Juna, dr. Richard Lee, and Najwa Shihab.

To increase brand awareness, there are several ways that Scarlett Whitening has done, including promoting through the owner's personal account (she is a celebrity and has a lot of followers), using influencer services, and using buzz marketing. The use of this strategy can be seen through several buzzer service management accounts that listed the Scarlett Whitening brand as a client.

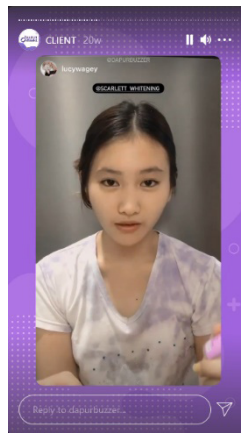


Figure 2. An example of a Scarlett Whitening buzzer managed by a buzzer management account (Source: [instagram.com/dapurbuzzer/](https://www.instagram.com/dapurbuzzer/))

Buzzers themselves are also easy to distinguish by the way they convey their message. In addition to repeating the same message over and over, buzzers tend to overly promote the product. Scarlett Whitening's reseller accounts can be categorized as buzzers due to their massive number and activeness in promoting products.



Figure 3. An example of a Scarlett Whitening buzzer in the form of a reseller account (Source: twitter.com)

The number of accounts buzzing the Scarlett Whitening brand at one time makes consumers inevitably seeing the name Scarlett Whitening, knowing what products are offered, how much they

cost, where to buy, and other related information so that they became familiar and curious to stop by the Scarlett Whitening account. Judging from the uploaded testimonial photos, the Scarlett Whitening product itself is a buzz-worthy product because it has proven to provide satisfying results. Thus, the buzzer's contribution to the virality of the Scarlett Whitening brand is to help consumers know the existence of the brand and expand consumers' paths to access the Scarlett Whitening.

4. Results and Discussion

Scarlett Whitening is a local skin care brand pioneered in 2017 by Felicya Angelista, an Indonesian soap opera actress. The first products were Whitening Shower Scrub and Whitening Body Lotion. This brand relies on Instagram as the main and the earliest social media platform created. Scarlett Whitening joined Twitter in December 2019, but has less than ten tweets to this date. This brand has been actively utilizing Tiktok since 2020 when the use of the platform was booming. Meanwhile, the marketplace platforms used by Scarlett Whitening are Shopee (since 2017) and Tokopedia (since 2019).

Based on a search from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017 on Twitter, there were only four tweets containing the keyword "scarlett whitening". The top tweet uses the name Immanuel Caesar Hito, possibly the account is a personal account belonging to Felicya's spouse, which is apparently no longer in use. Meanwhile, two other tweets have a distinctive reseller promotion tone and the last tweet is a testimonial. This shows that the use of buzzer was not done in the early days of the initiation of Scarlett Whitening, and reseller accounts were the earliest type of buzzer from this brand. At the beginning of the promotion period, Scarlett Whitening made more use of the owner's account which had high enough engagement to introduce products to potential consumers. Scarlett Whitening's initial content itself was mostly in the form of testimonial photos from consumers. Still using the Twitter platform, searches conducted between January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018 showed an increase in the number of tweets containing the keyword "scarlett whitening", but it was not difficult to find the end of the search results because there were not so many. Even though it is still dominated by resellers, a personal account with the username @vaniakwans has emerged and acted as a buzzer by uploading testimonials, persuading the audience to try Scarlett Whitening products.

A search using the same platform and keywords from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019 showed interesting results. Buzzers in the form of reseller accounts are still widely found, but buzzers in the form of personal accounts that review and expand the brand awareness of Scarlett Whitening have started to appear voluntarily.

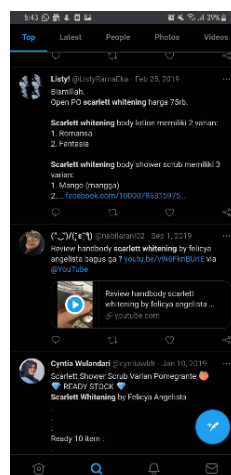


Figure 4. The 2019 search for the keyword "scarlett whitening" on the Twitter platform (Source: twitter.com)

The peak of Scarlett Whitening brand awareness surge was in 2020, along with the widespread use of Tiktok in Indonesia. Research from the Mobile App Store Marketing Intelligence Sensor Tower company shows that Tiktok has been downloaded by more than 300 million users in the first and second quarters of 2020. Indonesia is among the countries that downloaded TikTok in August 2020 and contributed 11 percent of the total 63.3 million downloads of Tik Tok on iOS and Android. Scarlett Whitening seems to be aware of both of these opportunities: buzz marketing and Tiktok. This brand started contacting personal accounts, whether they had a large following or not, and asked them to promote their products. The use of Tiktok buzzers is very effective because the platform is a trendsetter at the moment. With so many accounts promoting Scarlett Whitening, content related to products from this brand often appears on the For Your Page feature (Tiktok homepage, contains selected videos presented by Tiktok) and will be the first videos to be seen after entering the application.

Hashtag	Views
#scarlettwhitening	278.6M views
#scarlett_whitening	200.8M views
#scarlettwhiteningserum	2.2M views
#scarlettwhiteningfreshy	318.1K views
#scarlettwhiteningchallenge	167.5K views
#reviewscarlettwhitening	578.2K views
#scarlettwhiteningbodyton	61.6K views
#scarlettwhitening	793.4K views
#serumscarlett_whitening	116.3K views
#scarlettwhiteningoriginal	29.5K views
#scarlettwhiteningromansa	12.7K views
#scarlettwhiteningfacialwash	6015 views
#scarlettwhiteningmalang	6036 views
#scarlettwhiteningmurah	4467 views
#scarlettwhiteningmalaysia	2645 views

Figure 5. Hashtag #scarlettwhitening on Tiktok reached 278.6M usage. (Source: Tiktok)

Although the execution varies, the narratives and messages used by each buzzer tend to be similar or even the same.

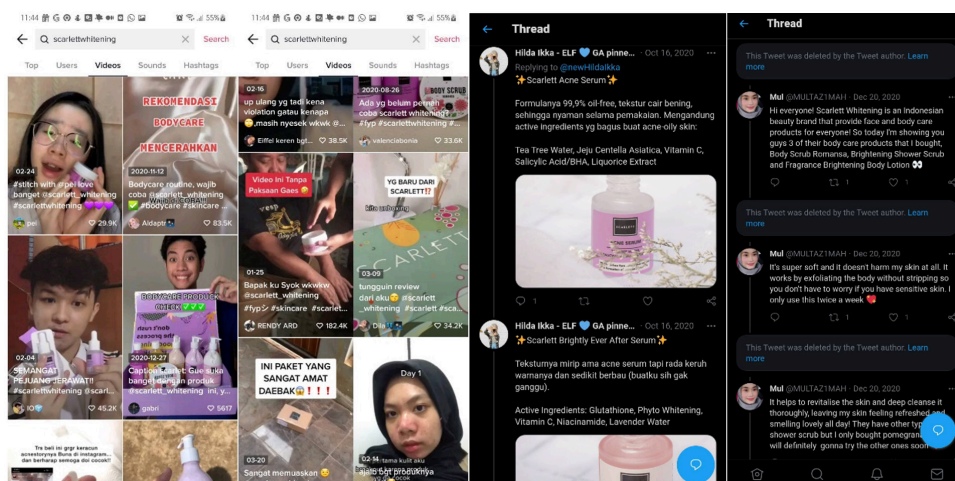


Figure 6. The forms of buzzers narration in carrying out the buzzing activity of Scarlett Whitening (Source: Tiktok and twitter.com)

Even though Tiktok is widely used, Scarlett Whitening still takes advantage of buzzers from

other platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter. Quoting from the video uploaded by Angel Pardede on Youtube on January 14, 2021, Scarlett Whitening contacted the people they choose using a marketing account. Apart from contacting directly, this brand also uses buzzer management services, such as @dapurbuzzer, @alphabet.management, and @nrmbuzzer. This massive promotion with buzz marketing on every platform has become one of the factors for Scarlett Whitening's brand awareness to increase rapidly in 2020.

The advantage of using buzzers compared to influencers or KOLs is that because the buzzer is not a "figure" with reputation or branding, the audience will pay more attention to the product being discussed (the message content) than who is talking about it. If in large quantities, this will certainly help expand brand awareness. Meanwhile, the weakness of the buzzer lies in the quality of the message conveyed. The repeated use of anonymous accounts to promote products causes the quality of the message to decline because the messenger is an unknown person and the audience feels annoyed. This may reduce the image of a brand so that it is considered less "professional" or not a high brand. Therefore, the brand must be able to estimate the impact and answer these problems before using buzzer services in large numbers, for example by improving product quality or making an adequate design so that it is still seen as a trustworthy brand.

Nowadays, it's increasingly difficult to tell the difference between a buzzer and an influencer. This happens because of several reasons: First, the use of spam accounts to promote products is rarely used now. Business owners prefer to use personal account services for buzzing. Second, personal accounts that are contracted to do buzzing are not influencers, but they do have a high number of followers and engagement, which is a characteristic of an influencer. In addition, they are also actively uploading the activities they do as content on social media and sometimes this causes some of their followers to participate in the same activities because they are "influenced" by the content. Last, the emergence of the term "nano-influencer". This term categorizes accounts with followers between 1,000 and 10,000 as part of influencers called nano-influencers. The term is considered more appropriate to describe personal accounts as mentioned in reason number 2 (Quoting from Redcomm, accessed April 7, 2021).

5. Conclusion

Buzz marketing is a digital form of the WOM marketing strategy. In accordance with its literal meaning, buzzer carries out buzzing activities or delivery of messages repeatedly so that the message conveyed spreads to a wider audience. Unlike influencers and KOLs who have value, reputation, and personal branding, buzzer accounts are generally nobody accounts, for example, regular personal accounts, reseller accounts, and even spam accounts. Massive use of buzzer like what Scarlett Whitening does is very appropriate to increase or expand brand awareness. With so many talks about a particular product at one time, the audience inevitably becomes aware of the product and may be provoked by their curiosity to find out about the product that is being discussed. Thus, more and more people will know and be familiar with the brand or product.

However, the brand or product itself must be buzz-worthy or worthy of being discussed, because surely after answering their curiosity, the audience will only consider make a purchase or buzz the brand or product if they have quality and are worth a try.

The advantage of using buzzer over influencers or KOL is that because it is conveyed by a large number of ordinary accounts that are nobody, the audience tends to be more reminded of "what was said" than "who said it". The audience will be more focused and reminded of the product or brand that is written in the repeated message. However, the use of an anonymous account for advertising or promotion activities can reduce the image of the advertiser's brand, giving the impression of "not a high brand" because it is promoted by regular accounts, reseller accounts, and even spam accounts repeatedly

and can be annoying. Thus, a brand must be able to overcome this possibility, for example by improving product quality or beautifying the visual appearance of the product or brand to add the impression of trustworthiness.

Additionally, in practice, buzzers and influencers are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish due to the development of accounts categorized as buzzers and the emergence of the term nano-influencer. Further research is needed to determine who or which is a buzzer so that advertisers can take advantage of this new media more effectively and strategically.

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