

# The Role of Flow Theory in Viral Promotional Advergimes: An exploration of Forwarding the Game and Sharing Personal Data

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of Flow theory in viral promotional advergimes with an emphasis on sharing personal data and forwarding the games. Using a viral marketing campaign, 393 out of 765 participants clicked on the game link sent via email, But 288 people participated in the game, 141 people answered the questions, invited their friends to the game, or shared their personal data. Poisson regression was used to investigate the role of Flow theory on game forwarding, and logistic regression was used on sharing personal data through Eviews software. Players with intrinsic enjoyment and psychological Flow (dimensions of Flow) tend to invite more people to the game and share more personal data about themselves. Perceived reward value is also positively related to game forwarding behaviors, although not related to sharing personal data. That is, players seem to communicate more about the game when they have extrinsic motivation (rewards), but are less likely to share personal data with the brand. On the other hand, extrinsically motivated players still have significant privacy concerns. In contrast, Flow is positively related to sharing personal data, suggesting that fully immersed players tend to "lose themselves" and forget about their more conscious concerns and thus appear more likely to share personal data with the brand. Companies that want to capture customers' personal data should focus more on designing game elements than rewards in such a way as to stimulate the psychological Flow of the players.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

The implementation of viral marketing in the framework of launching a viral campaign in the form of a video or an attractive content in the form of a game is produced and then advertised online to the target audience. Basically, users are quickly attracted to this ad and share it widely. The virality of an advertisement or message in the form of a game is done randomly and is suddenly welcomed by many people, but the design and implementation of viral campaigns requires a lot of planning and creativity to be able to manage it during the campaign activity, so that it moves on the right track. In this regard, games are an important part of advertising campaigns and have attracted a lot of attention from academics and experts in this field. Previous research has been mostly about in-game advertising or advertising games and the distinction between them (Castiblanco Jimenez, I.A. et al.,2023). Viral Promotional Advergimes combine a prize advertising game with an advertising game in a viral marketing campaign aimed at encouraging word of mouth to drive immediate responses and behavioral reactions from players towards goals such as; sharing personal data; forwarding the Game to friends lead to increase consumer knowledge of the brand and improve their attitude towards that brand. In this regard, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory (1975) is used, which considers Flow as a special mental state that appears when performing an action, in which the actor focuses on a task in such a way that he has a sense of adherence to, and completely Flows/immerses himself in the work and the satisfaction of the process of doing the work. In fact, he is so engrossed in doing it that he doesn't feel time, place, tiredness, hunger or unhappiness and concentrates on pursuing his work. But when they did the work, they lost that attachment and focus (Lavoie, R., & Main, K. 2019). In fact, the result of the work is not so important for these people, but it is the nature of the work they are doing is important to them. In the current research, it is investigated what factors will lead to such behavior, such as the mental state that these people experience while engaging in their profession and skills, and which is called the Flow state. It is a state in which a person is so engrossed in a task that nothing else matters to him, and this experience is so enjoyable that it is done only for its own sake. No studies have addressed the Flow experience in the context of viral advergimes. Flow in the game, including enjoying and disappearing in the game, directs the responses and immediate behavioral reactions of the players towards actions such as forwarding the game and sharing personal data, and in the marketing process it plays as an important strategy for advertising or comprehensive advertising of a brand, product or service(Kim, Yoon Jeon & Ifenthaler, Dirk. 2019). Finally, the main question is how the Flow theory in Viral Promotional Advergimes can lead players to forwarding games to friends and others and sharing personal data?.

### Theoretical framework

Games have evolved over time and with the advancement of technology. An emerging form of gamification is designed as part of viral marketing campaigns, where consumers play the gambit to win sales promotions. The target consumers of such games are mostly adults rather than children. During the game, players can increase their chances of winning if they share their personal data or if they invite their friends to play the game. To distinguish this type of game, which is a combination of a promotional game for the purpose of a prize with an advertising game for the purpose of advertising in a viral marketing campaign, the term Viral Promotional Advergimes is used. Due to the nature of advertising games, Viral Promotional Advergimes often contain advertising messages of a brand and try to increase one's perception of the brand's status and attract positive consumer opinion (Zhao, Z., & Renard, D. 2018). Also, viral advergimes are often designed as contests that allow consumers to win

prizes due to luck or skill, and are intended to elicit immediate behavioral responses, with the promise of an increased chance of winning if those behaviors are performed. Previous literature describes consumers' cognitive and affective perceptions of different types of games, although it mainly focuses on children as participants. The current research examines adult gamers' behavioral reactions to Viral Promotional Advergemes: namely, sharing personal data and Forwarding games. In addition, it examines how the internal and external values of adult players motivate such behaviors. Extensive empirical research confirms that Flow theory influences consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses such as attitudes, behavioral intentions, and actual behaviors (Sarkar, J.G., Sarkar, A. and Sreejesh, S. 2023). A few researchers have applied Flow theory to advergemes, but no studies have addressed experiences of Flow theory in the context of viral advergemes or examined specific consumer behavioral outcomes of sharing personal data and game Forwarding. For the measurement of Flow, the existing approaches are either unidimensional or multidimensional. Multidimensionality typically includes attributes such as challenge, mastery, control, focus, enjoyment, curiosity, arousal, involvement, playfulness, telepresence, and time distortion. One popular unidimensional measure relies on perceived playfulness, as with more immersive games, enjoyment and concentration have stronger effects on player perception and behavior. Playfulness exists to some extent in any activity in which one freely engages. This structure is reflected in the two dimensions of pleasure and intellectual freedom (disappearing into work). Both dimensions indicate a state of psychological Flow. Both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits can stimulate social sharing behaviors. With regard to intrinsic benefits, emotional diffusion theory suggests that social sharing occurs when people need to share their evoked emotional experience with others (Lavoie, Raymond & Main, Kelley & Stuart-Edwards, Anastasia. 2022). According to the existing literature, intrinsic enjoyment leads to a stronger intention to participate in online word-of-mouth advertising. Perceived playfulness implies a sense of engagement that is inherently pleasurable, creating a positive emotional state. In the context of Viral Promotional Advergemes, players' enjoyment of the game should lead to more positive evaluations, which increases the value of sharing personal data and Forwarding the game.

## Methodology

This research is applicable in terms of purpose, cross-sectional survey method in terms of method, and purposeful and accessible in terms of selection of the research sample. In this study, data was collected using a pre-test-post-test method with a real viral marketing campaign. An advertising game was created for a weekly cultural magazine (at the request of magazine officials, magazine details are not reported) and data was collected during the campaign. Subscribers are people who provide their email address in exchange for promotional offers. In the pre-test stage, subject to the respondents' agreement to participate in the survey, in the first step, they received an email with a self-administered questionnaire about their attitude towards the weekly brand. In the post-test phase, participants received another email asking them to participate in a viral advertising game and to allow their behavioral data to be collected during the game for research purposes. At last, 393 out of the 765 participants clicked on the game link sent via email, but 288 participated in the game; and 141 people answered the questions, invited their friends to the game, or shared their personal data. Finally, Poisson regression was used to investigate the role of Flow theory on game forwarding and logistic regression was used on sharing personal data through Eviews software.

## Discussion and Results

Flow is positively related to game Forwarding and personal data sharing behaviors, such that if games elicit higher levels of enjoyment and concentration, the players may also be more willing to share personal data and Forward games. While the perceived value of prizes has a positive and significant effect on Forwarding games by players, it will not have a significant effect on sharing personal data. Also, prior attitudes towards the brand moderate the effect of perceived value of rewards on game Forwarding behavior. Also, players with inner pleasure and psychological Flow (dimensions of Flow) are more inclined to invite more people to the game and share more personal data about themselves. Perceived reward value is also positively related to game Forwarding behaviors, although not related to sharing personal data. That is, players appear to communicate more about the game when extrinsically motivated, but are less likely to share personal data with the brand. On the other hand, extrinsically motivated players still have significant privacy concerns. In contrast, perceived playfulness is positively related to personal data sharing, suggesting that fully immersed players tend to "lose themselves" and forget their more conscious concerns. As a result, they seem more likely to share personal data with the brand. Another interesting result comes from the absence of a reciprocal relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with regard to both behaviors. The reason can be the complexity of external rewards in this study.

## Conclusion

Players with intrinsic enjoyment and psychological Flow (dimensions of Flow) tend to invite more people to the game and share more personal data about themselves, and perceived reward value is also positively related to game forwarding behaviors, although not related to sharing personal data. That is, players seem to communicate more about the game when they have extrinsic motivation (rewards), but are less likely to share personal data with the brand. Therefore, it is suggested; Companies that want to obtain customers' personal data should focus more on the design of game elements rather than prizes because the perceived value of prizes does not seem to have a significant and meaningful effect on the sharing of personal data. Games should also be designed in such a way as to induce psychological Flow/immersion in players; that is, game design elements should optimize the Flow or peak situation. On the other hand, companies that want to encourage players to submit their game should focus on both game design and prize placement, and prizes should be offered at different value levels to bias players' evaluations of more prizes. Previous research shows the importance of Flow for predicting learning, control, exploratory behaviors, positive subjective experiences, and other behavioral intentions (Lavoie & Main, 2019). Whereas, no previous studies have addressed the experience of Flowing/peaking in the context of Viral Promotional Advergaming or examining Sharing Personal Data and game forwarding behaviors. With a field study of a real campaign of Viral Promotional Advergaming, real data on player behavior is collected and how the intrinsic Flow/peak and extrinsic value of rewards are related to player behavior is measured. To measure intrinsic Flow/peak, players' perception of game playfulness was assessed (Chen, L.; Zhou, P.; Xiao, H. 2023). The results show that immersion in the game (enjoyment and immersion in the game) is positively related to game forwarding and Sharing Personal Data behaviors, while the external criterion related to the perceived value of rewards is positively related to game forwarding, but not to Sharing Personal Data. Furthermore, prior brand attitudes (prior to playing viral promotional games) moderate the effect of perceived value of rewards on game forwarding behavior.