

Teaching Note

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge: The Good, the Bad, and the Money

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Critical Incident Overview

This critical incident describes a situation in which Josh desires to participate in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge yet none of his friends challenge him. Josh didn't understand why some people were challenged multiple times while others were not invited to participate. The critical incident also examines the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge from the perspective of the non-profit organization, the ALS Association. This particular challenge was the most successful fundraiser in the Association's history and a review of the campaign was needed.

This critical incident could be used in basic and advanced marketing courses as well as courses in social media, consumer behavior, promotion, non-profit marketing, and social responsibility.

Research Methods

This was a single descriptive critical incident based on the secondary sources cited.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Analyze why people participate in viral marketing campaigns.
2. Evaluate the pros and cons of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge campaign.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do people participate or not participate in viral marketing campaigns? (LO 1)
2. What are the pros and cons of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge for the Non-profit organization? (LO 2)

Answers to Discussion Questions

1. Why do people participate or not participate in viral marketing campaigns? (LO 1)

INSTRUCTOR NOTE: When addressing this question, an instructor may find it easier to have students break their responses into two stages. First, students should understand the basic motivations behind human behavior and the theories that explain why individuals may or may not be motivated to participate in something like the Ice Bucket Challenge. Please note that the answer provided here will include material not presented in the critical incident. However, these basic theories are typically covered in classes such as Consumer Behavior, Promotion, and Principles of Marketing. As such, students should be able to integrate at least the basic concepts into their answers. Also, a solid discussion can be conducted by students without applying theory based solely on their attitudes, opinions, and personal experiences. The second part of this question addresses viral marketing and the use of social media. The vast majority of students will be very familiar with social media (probably more so than the instructor!). The challenge will be for the instructor to keep the class focused on social media's impact on viral campaigns such as the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge.

[Consumer Behavior Focus]

Abraham Maslow and others have claimed that development of interpersonal relationships, specifically the need for love and belongingness, is one of the fundamental human needs (Maslow, 1954). Everyone needs to feel loved and accepted. Without these interactions, people are lonely and unhappy (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The desire for love and belongingness translates into a need for acceptance by others. The fear of others rejecting you leads to conformity or peer pressure. Should that rejection occur, whether it is real or perceived, individuals experience social exclusion or social rejection (sometimes called peer rejection). These four conditions (conformity, peer pressure, social exclusion, and social rejection) are discussed below.

Conformity: Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to group norms (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The acts may result from direct or overt social pressure. Individuals frequently comply with the social group in order to avoid social rejection. While conformity is most common in youth, it can occur at all ages (McLeod, 2011). This distinction is important to note as the scenario in our critical incident involved participation by individuals of all ages. Group factors such as group size, social status, public opinion, and commitment to the group may affect the level of conformity displayed by an individual. Conformity is strongest among groups whose members are similar in age, culture, religion, or educational status.

Three major types of conformity have been identified (Kelman, 1958). *Compliance* is public conformity whereby an individual's public actions may differ from his/her private beliefs. Here, an individual would complete the Ice Bucket Challenge to meet a need for public approval, but would not actually believe in or support the cause (ALS). *Identification* occurs when an action is performed because it is supported by someone the individual likes or respects. Participating in the Challenge because one wants to emulate a celebrity or because a best friend asks would fall into this category. *Internalization* is when the individual has a deep personal belief or commitment to the cause. This is the strongest of the three levels of conformity because the value is actually internalized by the person. This level of personal commitment tends to be very

long term and signify deep personal involvement. Internalization would indicate someone had a deeply personal motivation to assist the ALS Association. Perhaps ALS had impacted a friend or family member so the desire to help generate support to fight the disease would be strong. Josh was not invited to participate in this challenge so his type of conformity is unknown.

Peer Pressure: Peer pressure is influence that a peer group, observers, or individuals exert that encourages others to change their attitudes, values, or behaviors to conform to group norms. In actuality, peer pressure is similar and can lead to conformity. Peer pressure appears to decline as individuals age. Until that time, peer pressure has been reported to exert considerable influence on style, food and drink (especially alcohol), appearance, and ideology. High-risk teen activities (drug use, sexual behaviors, reckless driving, and delinquency) are frequently linked to peer pressure (Durkin, 1996). However, the desire for social inclusion (to fit in as part of the group) will continue to drive youth behavior to meet the need for acceptance. For the critical incident, peer pressure might explain why some individuals participated in the Ice Bucket Challenge, even if they really didn't want to do the Challenge. The old axiom, "If Johnny jumped off a bridge..." comes into play here. Commonly for teens, the reply would be that if Johnny jumped off the bridge, so would the teen.

Social Exclusion: Social exclusion is the failure of society to provide certain individuals and groups with those rights and benefits normally available to its members (Social Exclusion, 2014). In the broad sense, this situation typically refers to employment, housing, health care, education, etc. However, it has alternatively been conceptualized to impact the individual or group on four correlated dimensions: insufficient access to social rights, material deprivation, limited social participation, and lack of normative integration (Vrooman & Hoff, 2013). The limited social participation is the area most applicable to the critical incident where Josh feels excluded from participating in the Ice Bucket Challenge.

Social exclusion can apply to individuals (LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) and communities (racial or economic). Contributors include race, income, social class, personal habits and appearance, religion, politics, and geographic location. Strong consequences have been linked to victims of social exclusion including crime, drug addiction, teen pregnancy, and suicide.

Social Rejection: Social rejection occurs when an individual is *deliberately* excluded from a social relationship or social interaction for social rather than practical reasons. The *deliberate* exclusion is what distinguishes social rejection from social exclusion. The rejection can be active (bullying or teasing) or passive (by ignoring or the "silent treatment"). Social rejection may be real or may be perceived by the individual. In this instance, Josh may have perceived that he was being rejected socially since his friends "ignored" him by not issuing him a challenge. Over an extended period of time, or for individuals who are more sensitive to rejection, problems may result. Consequences such as loneliness, low self-esteem, aggression, and depression have occurred (McDougall, Hymel, Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001).

According to Karen Bierman of Pennsylvania State University, children who experience social rejection frequently have trouble taking turns or sharing, may be aggressive or disruptive, have trouble paying attention, and have high rates of social anxiety (Bierman, 2003). Health

consequences such as high blood pressure, tuberculosis, physical pain, and suicide, have also been associated with social rejection (Cassel, 1976; MacDonald & Leary, 2005; Sommer, Kirkland, Newman, Estrella & Andreassi, 2009).

Summary: Thus, conformity and peer pressure would provide incentives for individuals to participate in the Ice Bucket Challenge—even if they may not have initially had the desire to participate. Individuals not challenged—and thus not given the opportunity to participate—may find themselves experiencing emotions and reactions associated with social exclusion or social rejection. The majority of people found the Ice Bucket Challenge to be “the” charity event of the summer and enjoyed the sense of fun and creativity that surrounded all the different ways in which people responded to the challenge. In addition, they felt good about contributing to a worthy cause and the ALS Association enjoyed a tremendous boost in awareness and donations. Overall, it was beneficial to MOST parties involved. However, for that group of individuals who were never challenged to participate, they may have been left with a sense of isolation or ostracism, frustrated at being left out of the biggest social campaign of the summer.

[Social Media Focus]

This question also addressed the structure of the Ice Bucket Challenge in the form of a viral marketing campaign. According to wikipedia,

Viral marketing, viral advertising, or marketing buzz are buzzwords referring to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networking services and other technologies to try to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through self-replicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of viruses or computer viruses. Viral marketing may be delivered by word of mouth or enhanced by the network effects of the Internet and mobile networks. Viral marketing may take the form of video clips, interactive Flash games, advergames, ebooks, brandable software, images, text messages, email messages, or web pages (Viral Marketing, 2014).

Most students will be very familiar with viral marketing as they are avid consumers of social media. The ultimate goal of marketers using viral marketing is to develop a campaign that will have a high probability of ‘catching on’ with the public; that is, individuals will consume the message and disseminate to friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances in a short period of time (“Viral marketing”, 2012). The preferred method of accomplishing a successful campaign is through the use of social media.

Social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). People use social media for news and information on companies, brands, and products. They use social media for entertainment and communication. In just one year the time Americans spent on social media increased 37 percent! (State of the Media, 2012). There is actual concern that social media services may be addictive as people increasingly check their media for “FOMO,” or “fear of missing out” on news-worthy posts (“Facebook’s S-1 filings”, 2011; Students Addicted, 2010).

At the same time, people are reportedly more resistant to direct marketing attempts through social media platforms than through traditional media. According to the Edelman Trust

Barometer (Edelman 2010), the majority of people found industry experts and academics more trustworthy than social media. This finding is important for the ALS Association and other non-profit entities who may look to social media for fundraising opportunities. Regardless of potential problems with credibility, social media is too valuable a marketing tool to ignore. A few statistics citing the importance of social media tools are listed below:

- Consumers continue to spend more time on social networks than on any other category of sites—roughly 20 percent of their total time online via personal computer (PC), and 30 percent of total time online via mobile (State of the Media, 2012).
- Facebook remains the most-visited social network in the U.S. via PC (152.2 million visitors), mobile apps (78.4 million users) and mobile web (74.3 million visitors), and is multiple times the size of the next largest social site across each platform (State of the Media, 2012).
- 51% of people aged 25–34 used social networking in the office, more than any other age group (State of the Media, 2012).
- As of 2012, effectively using Facebook and Twitter in small businesses can increase profits up to 43% (McLeod, 2011).
- A total of 234 million people age 13 and older in the U.S. used mobile devices in December 2009 (“VentureBeat,” 2012).
- Twitter processed more than one billion tweets in December 2009 and averages almost 40 million tweets per day (“VentureBeat,” 2012).
- The number of social media users age 65 and older grew 100 percent throughout 2010, so that one in four people in that age group are now part of a social networking site (Boomers, 2010).
- As of May 2012 Facebook has 901 million users (“Facebook’s S-1 filings,” 2011).
- Social media has overtaken pornography as the No. 1 activity on the web (Socialnomics, 2012).
- YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world (Socialnomics, 2012).

Instructors can use the information provided in this answer in different ways depending on the nature of the class and/or the discussion desired by the instructor. Social media impacts both business and consumer actions. Corporations must be cognizant of the power of social media today and the potentially strong influence it has for consumer actions. Additionally, understanding the theory behind consumer behavior and how individuals, like Josh, may react to social media campaigns—with both positive and negative outcomes possible, can help students to grasp the more personal effects of social media campaigns.

2. What are the pros and cons of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge for the Non-profit organization? (LO 2)

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was deemed one of the most successful social media fundraising campaigns in history. However this does not mean that there are not problems that need to be considered when looking at the overall success of this campaign. Table 1 below lists some of the pros and cons associated with this campaign. Although this list is fairly exhaustive, due to the recency of this campaign, the long-term ramifications of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge are not known. Because of this, it is likely additional pros and cons could be added over time. A more detailed description of each of the items on this list is given after the table.

Table 1: Pros and Cons of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

| Pros | Cons |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generated Significant Revenues (more than \$114 Million) for the ALS Association• Enhanced Cause Awareness• New Donor List Possible• Gained Lots of Press and Publicity• Utilized a Variety of Social Media Platforms• Uses a Multiplicative Formula for Exponential Growth• Doesn't Require Talent, Commitment, or Time to Participate | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased Scrutiny Towards the ALS Association and Its Expenditures• Nature of Campaign and Ease of Donation• ALS Not Mentioned in Many Videos• Percent Who Donate Small• Takes Away Donations from Other Nonprofits• ALS Not Originator of Campaign and It is Difficult to Maintain Continued Success• Encourages Slacktivism• Short-term Fundraising Only• May Disengage Regular Donors• Environmental Concerns |

Pros of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

One of the major advantages of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was the challenge's ability to generate a significant amount of revenue for the ALS Association. As of mid-September 2014, this challenge generated more than \$114 million for the ALS Association. Considering the ALS Association typically has a budget of approximately \$25 million annually, this is a drastic increase in financial contributions (ALS Association, 2014).

Another advantage of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge is the tremendous amount of awareness gained towards the ALS cause. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge is credited with heightened awareness which has led to other successful fundraising efforts. For example, the most recent annual ALS Association Rhode Island Chapter's Walk reported having their "best year ever," partially due to the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge (Warwick Beacon, 2014).

Because of the success of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, the ALS Association also has a new list of donors who had not donated to the ALS Association previously. The ALS Association can nicely remind these individuals to continue donating to this cause in the future. In addition, the ALS Association can also now use social media to communicate with all the individuals who used the well-established hash tag #ALSIceBucketChallenge as well (Mandel, 2014).

Another significant advantage of this particular challenge was that it garnered a lot of press. There was a tremendous amount of publicity which is always a good thing for an organization promoting a cause. This publicity was evident in the fact that many celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Justin Timberlake, Matt Damon, Kate Hudson, John Mayer, Eminem, Tina Fey, Mandy Moore, Chris Hemsworth, Taylor Swift, Charlie Sheen, Dolly Parton, Bill Gates, President George W. Bush, the cast of the Today Show, and many more all took the Challenge.

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was successful because it did not require talent, commitment, or time to participate. It also used a multiplicative formula for exponential growth and could be done on a variety of social media platforms. In essence, the reason that this challenge went viral

and was extremely successful was because of 1) exponential growth due to every participant naming three more potential participants; 2) easy tagging by participants via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube; 3) the 24-hour deadline that causes the nominated participant to act quickly; 4) fun and easy participation; 5) the objective was simple and clearly identified; 6) social proofing (peer pressure) and fear of missing out; and 7) it gave participants a chance to feel good (Boko, 2014; Ederer, 2014)

Cons of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

One of the major cons or disadvantages of this campaign stems from the higher scrutiny and ratcheting up of expectations for the organization due to the large amount of capital brought in by the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge Campaign (CBS This Morning, 2014). As a non-profit, the ALS Association has to be careful with the sudden increase in donations as it can negatively impact the ALS Association's standing with nonprofit watchdog groups such as Charity Navigator and the Better Business Bureau (Smith, 2014). These nonprofit watchdog groups monitor and rate how non-profit organizations spend their money. However unless the ALS association spends nearly all of the money raised during the Ice Bucket Challenge in the current fiscal year, the ALS Association's rating will likely decline (Zillman, 2014). The ALS Association has already indicated that spending this amount of money before the end of their fiscal year (January 2015) is not going to happen (ALS Association, 2014) although the ALS Association announced in early October 2014 that the initial allocation of \$21.7 million of the Ice Bucket Challenge monies was going to be used to create a grant to support ALS research (WCVB.com, 2014).

Another disadvantage deals with the nature of the Ice Bucket Challenge. The original premise of this challenge is that if a participant dumps a bucket of ice water on his or her head, then they do not have to donate (Holland, 2014; Mizrahi, 2014). Furthermore, this campaign did not make it easy to donate. In many instances, the person participating in the challenge is the one responsible for asking for a donation from those that he or she nominates to the challenge (Mizrahi, 2014). Because of this, ALS was not mentioned in many of the donor videos (Holland, 2014).

Although the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge did bring in considerable amounts of donations to the ALS Association, studies show that the majority of participants did not actually donate. In Britain, one out of every six people (17%) participated in the Ice Bucket Challenge; however, only 10% of those that participated actually donated (Baton, 2014). In addition, it is likely that people contributing money to the ALS Association due to the Ice Bucket Challenge may choose to not contribute to other non-profits. Due to a limited budget and moral licensing, the ice bucket challenge may crowd out contributions to other charities (Ederer, 2014).

With many viral campaigns, this particular campaign was not planned. In fact, it did not even originate with the ALS Association (Creaser, 2014; Steel, 2014). The campaign was also short-term and continued success of this campaign is unlikely. In fact, this particular campaign encouraged slacktivism, a situation where "activists" support an effort through social media without really getting involved with the charity or making any long-term commitment to the cause (Flipcause, 2014). In addition, due to the significant funds raised by this campaign, it is possible that regular donors to the ALS Association will reduce future donations which could

hurt ALS fundraising in the long-term (Flipcause, 2014). Because of this, other weaknesses of this campaign are that it will not generate significant long-term donations, it encouraged slacktivism, may disengage regular donors, and that it is impossible to predict what type of viral marketing campaign will be successful in the future.

Although this may seem trivial, one other disadvantage may be that the ALS Association might be viewed as being unfriendly to the environment due to wasting a significant amount of water with the Challenge. Because of the severe drought facing individuals from California during the time that the Ice Bucket Challenge was going on, it is possible that the ALS Association could be seen as insensitive to ongoing environmental concerns (Flipcause, 2014).

Note to Professor: It is very possible that students may come up with other viable pros and cons for this campaign. Encourage students to think about the pros and cons from a variety of viewpoints (e.g. the ALS Association, the participants, other Non-Profits, etc). In addition, encourage students to think about the impact that each one of the pros and cons has on the overall campaign as not all of the pros and cons should be equally weighted. Professors can also ask students to think about what the ALS Association might do next. Some suggestions would include: regular updates on how the funds are being used; calculated and tailored marketing to former Ice Bucket Challenge participants, remind long-term donors of their importance, and foster more engagement with influencers on social media.

Epilogue

As of August 2015, the money raised during the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge seems to have drastically changed ALS Research (Weingus, 2015). Over the past year, there appears to be many exciting advances in ALS Research, including research dealing with TDP-43. TDP-43 is a protein in cells that has a link to ALS and based upon this new research, this protein has been found to be ineffective in 97% of ALS cases. Jonathan Ling, an ALS researcher, estimates that therapies treating TDP-43 deficiencies may be available within the next two to three years (Weingus, 2015). This research and hope for new treatments was made possible because of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. It is very likely that more results from other studies made possible because of the success of this Challenge will be forthcoming in the near future.

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