# Theorising ambiguity: telling deliberately equivocal viral stories

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## 2. Users, innovation, and driving forces

This chapter contains two distinct but related discussions of innovation processes. Throughout the chapter, agency and driving forces are discussed in order to elaborate on how innovations come into being, as well as how they retain their position.

The first part of the chapter explores the relationship between users, producers, and innovations; and contemplates whether the innovation originates from the producers or the users. As a further elaboration of the relation between stability and changes, the second part presents two theoretical approaches to ways innovations and users are related in innovation processes. The two approaches provide distinct and contrasting conceptualizations regarding what is changed and how that change is effectuated; they address agency differently when it comes to the relations between users, producers, and innovations. Their main concepts of diffusion and translation are contrasted and related specifically to viral reality marketing.

### 2.1 Viral reality marketing – an example

As we saw in previous examples there already exists an environment in which people share, modify, and communicate through making references. In viral marketing, companies and advertising agencies try to utilize this as a resource. They often do so by creating something that is both entertainment and yet at the same time advertisement, to encourage information dissemination. Furthermore, in viral *reality* marketing a new trend has emerged over the last few years. Companies and advertising agencies attempt to boost dissemination even more, by creating ambiguous content that allows people to add their personal touch, as they fill in gaps and put together pieces of information to create new stories.

As an appetizer for the theoretical discussions in this chapter, and as an empirical reminder why the relationship between innovation, driving forces, and users, is highly relevant, I will give a brief introduction to a viral reality marketing case. Later, it will be analyzed further, but for now it serves to illustrate how participants actively shape the campaign.

In 2009, VisitDenmark attempted to send a message to people outside Denmark making them aware of Denmark as a nice country worth visiting. On their professional team was an ad agency, Grey, which developed and refined the idea for the story that was told, and a professional Seeder, GoViral, which made sure the story got reach through various digital platforms.

Together they produced and seeded a video that was soon to be found on YouTube, Facebook, and blogs. The video contained a story of a mother who was looking for the father of her child. She confessed to the camera, that she met the father, a visiting foreigner 1½ year ago, and that she had wanted to show him what "hygge"[14] was. As a result of the "hygge" she got pregnant. The purpose of the story was to generate interest among as many as possible, thus creating awareness of Denmark as a nice safe place to visit (Politiken 2009). Along with the video, the mother had made a homepage with pictures of herself and the child along with a message board where people could send messages – supposedly if they had any useful information concerning the father[xvii].

When the time was right VisitDenmark had planned to reveal that the mother was in fact an actress, and that the media stunt was pulled off by them, to create awareness of Denmark as a nice place to visit. Unfortunately, they were granted only a few days, before someone else revealed the mother to be an actress, and the child to be someone else's.

However, before they publicly confirmed that it was a campaign, many different responses had already emerged in relation to this story.

→ Some people started attacking the story's trustworthiness. This was done in many places simultaneously: on the message board, in threads on Facebook, in comments on blogs and on the various YouTube channels that had uploaded the video. These attacks mostly dealt with how the mother was too good looking and too confident to appear realistic, and how she was far too carefree to be an actual mom.

→ Others started defending the mother, telling her directly, on her homepage, that *they* believed her, and that she should just ignore all those who did not. These people offered their true support and empathy.

→Hitler Rants Parodies of course, comes into play in several versions. In one version Hitler is informed that the girl he met and had fun with while in Denmark became pregnant and is now looking for the father[xviii].

→ A marketing company made a public response to declare that *they* were not behind it, and that they distanced themselves from dishonest advertising.

[14] According to Danes at least, hygge is a non-translatable term, yet somewhat similar to "coziness." Practicing "hygge" is something that the Danish consider a uniquely Danish trait.

→ As the attention grew even more copies of the mother were uploaded to YouTube. Along with videos of the mother, a pattern of new videos emerged, in which fathers, in humoristic ways, searched for the mother. This was a mix of unknown people and public figures primarily comedians and famous Youtubers who promoted themselves by twisting elements of the story, for instance, by replacing the baby's bottle of milk with a bottle of beer or replacing the baby with a teddy bear.

→ Other marketing stunts became related to it. Marketing experts discussed how the story was potentially a rip off from a Danish artist's attempt to make the public aware of his name. This artist put up a poster at a music festival with the text *"Mathias from Ørebro. Where are you? Remember last year at Roskilde? I never got your last name. This is your son"*[xix] followed by a picture of a child and a suggested meeting place two days later at the festival. This was a stunt to gather curious people's attention and make them remember the artist's name: "HuskMitNavn"[15]-

→ Immediately after someone had found out that the "mother" was in fact an actress, a group of bloggers started discussing what this presumed advertising was for, suggesting that it could be the actress promoting herself. They also suggested that the homepage provider she was using could be the potential company behind it, thereby showing how much a homepage can do. Others suggested that it was a condom company raising awareness for safe sex.

→ A journalist who had been writing in his newspaper about the mother, believing the story to be true, discovered that he was misled, and by extension had mislead readers. As it was revealed to be a campaign from VisitDenmark, the angry journalist volunteered to be interviewed along with the managing director of VisitDenmark on national television during prime time. He argued that Denmark had been branded on a lie, and he felt deceived. The managing director however, defended her story, by saying that it was posted on YouTube, where people never take things too seriously. She further argued that it showed how Denmark is a free country, where young single mothers can have good, decent, and independent lives. From the substantial headlines of the newspapers. In the following days, the journalist seemed to have succeeded in making his version as the most convincing interpretation.

→ VisitDenmark apologized for the campaign and decided to remove the video from the internet. However, many people had already downloaded local copies which they instantly re-uploaded, and

[15] In English, RememberMyName

because of the removal, even more interpretations of the father's response, as well as new mothers seeking fathers (for their teddy bears, dolls, and puppies) were made in the following weeks.

→ The leader of VisitDenmark stepped down because of the campaign. Two others were fired, and the news media suggested that the leader would have been fired had she not stepped down. Confirming if this is what really happened was not possible, for both Grey and VisitDenmark referred to press releases and did neither confirm nor deny that the people who no longer held their jobs were fired because of the campaign.

→ The advertising agency Grey announced that they ended collaboration with VisitDenmark without going into details as to why.

→ The press was kept busy with guessing, analyzing, and calling in experts to explain what had been going on.

I will go into the campaign in depth later, but for now it serves to illustrate the complexity when it comes to categorizing who are users, innovators as well as what the innovation is.

## 2.2. The role of users in user-driven innovation

The concept of user-driven innovation is one of the core concepts in the project "Virtual worlds - Sense-making and Innovation" of which my PhD project has been a part. One of the primary reasons for choosing viral marketing as an object of study in the first place, was that I found it interesting in relation to the concept of user-driven innovation. From the very beginning, I believed that the question of whether ads can spread and infect people in the same way viruses can, could lead me to a better understanding of user-driven innovation in an empirical setting. The argument was that there was an *interesting shift in the role of the users* in this type of advertising compared to other forms. My initial assumption was that users were the *driving force*, since, in viral marketing, they participate actively as opposed to more traditional marketing where they are considered passive receivers. But as the introduction to this dissertation suggests, we are dealing with a complex setting, where the role of user and producer are difficult to separate empirically, and where algorithms' scripts and other digital infrastructures act as amplifiers, thereby playing an active role in dissemination as well. Studies of user-driven innovation alone are not suited to cover this sufficiently. However, they have a great theoretical value since, instead of *dividing* into users and innovation, they allow us to question the *relationship* between them. Later in this chapter I will go into detail with the role on non-human

actors such as digital infrastructures and algorithms. For now, user-driven innovation is used as a starting point for a more extensive theoretical discussion of the role of users in innovation processes.

### 2.2.1 Users as a resource for innovators

One way I have directed my search for literature on user-driven innovation is by focusing on studies that include Danish companies and are concerned specifically with user-driven innovation within the public sector. This has a great contextual value, since the three cases of viral reality marketing I encountered, have several things in common that fit with this strand of literature: all were financed by the Danish government, and they all targeted citizens. They reached out with messages to the public, while using the same methods that viral marketing does when promoting products. The question that concerned me was whether the same way of sending messages and creating awareness that is used on potential consumers, will also work for citizens, and whether it makes a difference if the sender is a publicly funded organization as opposed to a company that makes profit from sales. At this point it should be mentioned that viral reality marketing had mostly been used to promote movies, and primarily in the US. Therefore, the format was not well known to Danes yet, and most certainly not in the context of communication between government and citizens.

There were similar attempts to reach people with these methods in other countries. This included attempts that did not seek profit but aimed to create public awareness of ways to help others. The case I find most inspiring was a Dutch reality television program which portrayed a supposedly terminally ill 37-year-old woman donating a kidney to one of twenty-five people in need of a new kidney. Before the grand finale there was a selection, after which only three people remained. Viewers were invited to participate in giving the donator advice on who to choose as the receiver. Towards the end of the show, it was revealed to the public, that although the three candidates were real kidney patients; they were aware that the supposedly terminally ill woman was an actress, and the show was a stunt to raise awareness of the importance of getting more donors. They all voluntarily participated to create awareness about the limited number of organ donors in the Netherlands and to get the shortage of donors back on the political agenda. Thus, the idea of communicating noncommercial messages through controversial staged stories was not new and I was aware of it from the beginning of the dissertation. Yet it is important to remember, that in Denmark such campaigns had not been seen before.

In hindsight it turned out that this new way of creating awareness in Denmark only had the three major cases. But at the time of writing the focus on user-driven innovation – based on the affiliation

with the virtual worlds and user-driven innovation- and the promising pattern of several publicly funded organizations using this kind of advertising, shaped the context around my dissertation. Therefore, the connection between user-driven innovation, and the public sector in Denmark was highly relevant at the time. In addition, the concept of user-driven innovation had gained much attention the last ten years in Denmark particularly within the public sector. Since all my cases of viral reality marketing are made, and financed, by the Danish public sector, the literature provided in this section illustrates, and deals with, differences between the public and private sector, with the advantage that we get insights in some of the practical challenges when converting business models – such as user-driven innovation, from the private sector into the public sector.

User-driven innovation as a concept has grown in influence in Denmark over the last few years. According to the annual report on the government's strategy for further ensuring high quality in the public sector of 2007, particularly two elements play a crucial role in considering user-driven innovation. Firstly, there is the financial challenge due to the growing amount of elderly people and diminished group of working people, which results in a demand for more resources. Secondly, the new technology available enables new types of services for the citizens. These have led the Danish government to emphasize "innovation of the public services" (Danish Government 2006). In November 2006, the Danish Government entered into an agreement with three of the biggest political parties (Erhverv & Byggestyrelsen 2011). As a part of that agreement, under the theme "Denmark as leading innovative country," 100 million Danish Crowns, per year from 2007 to 2009 was marked for a special program for user-driven innovation. The program was the first of its kind in the world and was administered by the Business and Building government agency. The purpose of the program was to strengthen the development of new products, services, concepts, and processes in businesses as well as public institutions through increased use of user-driven innovation. By looking more closely at this program, it becomes clear how user-driven innovation is conceptualized, what roles are ascribed to the users, and where the innovation comes from.

According to the declaration for the program, subsidies are given to projects that develop and test methods for user-driven innovation. The Business and Building government agency define user-driven innovation as:

> *"The process by which one obtains knowledge from the users for the purpose of developing new products. A process of user-driven innovation is based on an understanding of user needs and a systematic involvement of the users"*[xx]*. (Emily and Høgenhaven 2008; Rosted 2005).*

They emphasize that user-driven innovation is about involving the users in the innovation process in new ways. By focusing on the user's currently existing needs, as well as future needs, products, and services, which more effectively and precisely comply with these needs can be created. This includes needs that the users might not yet have recognized. According to the program manifesto, innovation that takes point of departure in the user's recognized and unrecognized needs is more bulletproof and has a greater chance of obtaining commercial success and increases satisfaction among (future) users. Thus, user-driven innovation is seen as an important tool for strengthening the Danish business community's competitive position and to create better welfare solutions for the public sector.

Let us start with three examples that illustrate how users, innovators and innovations are conceptualized.

**"Intelligent building materials" 2-year project. Budget: 2.7 million Danish Crowns.**

> *"The innovation is building materials that communicate with the user. This is made possible through the combination of IT and building materials. With this combination the outcome expected is intelligent." (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008)*

According to the manager of the project Kristine van het Erve Grunnet, the idea has been obvious all along. The only reason innovation has not yet been realized is that the producers of the material have not been convinced that anyone is willing to pay for intelligent materials. In addition, the IT suppliers and the producers come from two different worlds that have not communicated before (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008: 5). Here the innovation consists of bringing together two previously unrelated elements, the material and the opportunities provided by IT. The innovators are the people behind the project and their entrepreneurial role is in bringing together two previously unrelated worlds. Users are the ones who, in the end, determine whether the innovation will be successful, as they decide whether to spend money on it or not. Bringing in users early in the process enables the innovators to figure out if a need for IT support in building material is present. If the users see the value in it, and are willing to invest in it, then the innovators will know their innovation is worth developing further.

**Serious games interactive" 3-year project. Budget 2.5 million Danish Crowns.**

> *"Lead users play a major role.[…] [they] are assumed to have needs that the rest will get at a later point. The innovation, a game for school children, is a tool that enables the lead users, i.e., teachers to engage their students in the education through computer games. By allowing teachers to try out the games themselves or engaging students, they*

> *can provide valuable feedback on what sort of support the design of the game can provide."* (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008: 7)

Here, the students might be the end-users when playing the game, however, the relevant users to involve are not the players but the teachers, who can hopefully enhance their teaching. The innovation resides with the game designers who have combined teaching with something the students are assumed to think is fun. Thus, even though no end users are included directly, the students and teachers are assumed to have needs in terms of teaching that exceeds traditional books. This shows that users are not only providing knowledge about needs, (recognized or not) they are also customized and surrounded with assumptions as a new innovation is presented. The innovation is the game that is made by the innovators. It is the combination of assumed needs of teachers and students.

**Customer needs" 20 months project. 7.4 million Danish Crowns.**

The project is about a few shops for sports equipment, using user involvement to be able to better know the needs of the users when shopping, to provide better services for them. To better understand the experience of the customer, stores across the country were used as test facilities. The customers, the employees and the store area were surveyed with cameras. According to the project manager these recordings helped to retain the Customers' experiences. They helped to confirm or reject the assumptions of customer based on specific behavior. One example emphasized was whether the fitting room was big enough.

> *"By going through the recordings it was no longer about assumptions, instead the employees had reality to relate to".* (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008:13)

The result for the stores, was that some products were placed differently according to size and brand, respectively. Further, because of the newly gained awareness of the shop through video recordings, an increased focus on keeping things in order in the stores was achieved. The employees agreed that it had been an eye opener to involve the users, and by showing recordings to the employees the need for enhancements had been easier for them to relate to (Erhvervs & Byggestyrelsen 2008: 13). This case had the most passive group of users, since they were not aware or their participation. It is only the actions of the users, not their explanations and opinions, which were considered relevant. With this method the store risked missing differences between what users do and how they experience it. Cameras might have proved that there was plenty of space while the customers felt differently. The assumption was that needs are measured from actions not opinions. Here the innovation was the

camera enabling employees to get an insight into consumer behavior that they do not normally have access to.

In all three cases, we see that the users' role is passive, and when active, the purpose of their involvement is to extract knowledge about their needs. User-driven innovation is a method, and users are a resource in testing and developing an already assumed innovation. The innovation lies in bringing previously unrelated elements together, and those who do so are the innovators. From this objective we see that users are considered important, yet they are a resource for those who develop products for them – the innovators. Even though these studies provide no knowledge on viral reality marketing, they illustrate a very fixed concept of users, innovators, and innovations.

The user-driven discourse within the Danish public sector is not only a key to successes; it is also subjected to more critical voices. In the wake of the focus on user-driven innovation in the public sector, a lot of consideration has gone into whether a concept successful in the private sector could be converted in the public sector. Reports on implementing user-driven innovation from the private to the public sector agree on this concern and emphasize that the two sectors pursue very different objectives (van Duivenboden and Thaens 2008; Halvorsen et al. 2005; Kristensen 2007). Where private firms strive to maximize profit and enhance their position in the market, public organizations engage in implementing the policies outlined by politicians aiming at increased welfare, democracy, and legitimacy. Birgit Jæger argues that we have to re-define the concept in a way that reflects the conditions for the public sector. (Birgit Jæger 2011). She notes that the user-role is complicated as *"users are citizens, clients, customers, participants, firms, staff",* meaning they are sometimes both responsible for the delivered service and purchaser of it. Users cover a variety of roles at many levels. The role of users must be elaborated on since it constitutes a large group of heterogeneous individuals. The concept of users is complex. Even though the above-mentioned projects are not about viral reality marketing, they provide insights to a particular way of conceptualizing the relation between users and innovations: a role where the users as actively participating is not present. The innovation and the innovators innovate *for* and *on behalf of* them.

It is this context of understanding what users are, and the passive role they are expected to play, that we need to keep in mind when understanding why publicly funded organizations fail to succeed in viral reality marketing campaigns. User-driven innovation is about benefitting from user's input while assuming control and responsibility. This is quite in contrast to the genre of viral stories in which we

have seen that things quickly get out of control, and retain a life of their own, due to the actively participating crowds on the internet.

### 2.2.2 Users as the source of innovations

As we have just seen, user-driven innovation within the public sector in Denmark (and many other areas as well) deals with a promise of better product development. It emphasizes a strategic approach, presenting the users as a **resource** valuable to innovators and producers. This approach acknowledges users' important role in the development process. Since the product is developed *for* users while including them in the early stage of development, there is a great promise for innovation. There is, however, a second perspective on user-driven innovation I would like to bring forward. Here the product is developed *by* the user. This approach deals with the concept of innovation as something that emerges from networks of users who customize products and exchange ideas and tools, thereby enabling more users to innovate for their own benefit. This perspective represents a different take on innovation and hence the role of users. It ascribes power to users, using democratization as a core concept. Thus, users are the **source** from where innovations emerge. User-driven innovation is a phenomenon, as opposed to the previous perspective where including users was to be considered a method. Consequently, the role ascribed to users is different: They are not used by anyone else, instead they are the focus since they are the driving force of innovations.

When going back to the literature, users have played a role during innovation of products since at least Adam Smith (Smith 1759; Bogers, Afuah, and Bastian 2010). The user and his or her motivations were portrayed as an important driving force, but it was not up until the sixties that users as a category was considered of importance to the product development process. An early research stream, portrays users' important, however peripheral, role in providing producers with inputs (Burns and Stalker 1961; Myers and Marquis 1969; Rothwell 1977). Later research, with Eric von Hippel as one of the pioneers, has gone even further, by arguing that users can be the prime source of innovations. The users themselves, can be innovators, not just a resource to the producers who innovate (Hippel 1988). Since then, research on users as innovators has extended to areas as diverse as industry dynamics, entrepreneurship, firm boundaries measurement, and policy (Hippel 2005; Shah and Tripsas 2007). Today a variety of studies position the user as their primary focus, acknowledging their active role as innovators.

Hippel refers to the concept of user-driven innovation in a variety of settings. Other studies could have been included as well, but most of them resort to a specific innovation, whereas Hippel is

concerned with the general role of users. Hippel has developed a framework for understanding the phenomenon itself, independent of the specific empirical setting in which it is located. The keywords in Hippel's approach are "freely", "democratization" and "horizontal networks".

Hippel's approach firstly emphasizes a distinction between innovation users and innovation manufacturers. Users are those who expect to benefit from *using* a product or service. They are unique in that they alone benefit directly from innovations, all others must *sell* innovation related products or services to users in order to profit from innovations (Hippel 2007:3). This distinction does not separate people as either users or manufacturers; the determining factor is what kind of benefit they expect from their actions. For instance, we might see Boeing as a manufacturer of airplanes, while it is also a user of machine tools. If we are interested in innovations developed by Boeing for the airplanes it sells, then Boeing can be considered a manufacturer innovator. If, instead, we are interested in metal-forming machinery developed by Boeing for in-house use when constructing their airplanes, we can characterize them as user innovators. It depends on the innovation we want to focus on and what kinds of benefits someone gets from them, whether they are considered users or manufacturers. Hippel's focus lies with the user innovators, emphasizing that the innovations worth paying attention to are in their hands, and emerge from them. He points to a recent development, and to a new trend towards democratization since users are increasingly able to innovate for themselves. He argues that the reason for this, should be found in technologies enabling easy share-ability and exchange of information. (Hippel 2005:121ff). Users can develop what they want, instead of relying on manufactures to create something that corresponds with their local needs (Hippel 2005:54ff). To emphasize this trend, he suggests the concept of networks by which he means:

> *"[N]odes interconnected by information transfer links which involves face-to-face, electronic or any other form of communication" (Hippel 2007:3).*

What is characteristic for these user innovation networks is that they are horizontal.

> *"It is our contention that completely fully-functional innovation networks can be built up horizontally – with actors consisting only of innovation users" (Hippel 2007:3).*

The horizontal user innovation networks have a great advantage over the manufacturer-centric innovation development systems, which have been the mainstay of commerce for hundreds of years. Without the restriction of the available marketplace or dependence on a specific manufacturer to act as its (often very imperfect) agent, networks of users can develop exactly what they want. The

horizontal adjective indicates that there is no hierarchy, but instead a flat structure in which whoever wants to innovate can do so, since resources are available to all.

Hippel's approach, in contrast to the Danish government's use of user-driven innovation sees users as the source, not as anyone else's resource. However innovation users can be used as a resource: According to Borges et al we need to work with two definitions; users as *postimplementation adapters,* and users as *sources of innovation-related knowledge* (Bogers, Afuah, and Bastian 2010:865). The research in this area deals with how producers can take advantage of users' ability to innovate by helping them in providing tools for further innovations. Examples mentioned here are car producers who provide additional accessories to facilitate users in their innovations within the scope of the producer's original innovations. Such accessories would be sunroofs, stereos, larger tires and so on. These studies operate along the same conceptualizations as we shall later see used by Rogers and Charters & Pellegrin (Charters and Pellegrin 1973; Rogers 2003). They operate with two categories, which they analytically separate: the original as the innovation, and the customized versions as re-inventions. Thus, studies that focus on post-implementation adaptation insist on analytically separating the original innovation from the reinventions made by users after implementation. They suggest that in the first place there must be an innovation, which the users reinvent adapt and modify. Studies that operate with users as post-implementation adapters, argue that users play an important role in the innovation process, but only *after* a technology is implemented (Leonard-Barton 1992; Hippel and Tyre 1995).

Other strands of literature have turned their focus to users as sources of innovation-related knowledge. Three such concepts are Consumer-Active Paradigm, Lead users and Co-creation. Hippel developed the concept of Customer-Active Paradigm (as opposed to Manufacturer-Active Paradigm) (Hippel 1978), which is when users take initiative to bring their innovations to producers. There have also been attempts to extend this user view for example by integrating the user's entrepreneurial role and thus commercial diffusion of innovation (Foxall and Tierney 1984). Another suggestion as to how producers can take advantage of users' ability to innovate is presented through the concept of lead users. This involves locating users on the leading edges of the target market as well as users from other markets that face similar problems, in an extreme form (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2003; Vargo and Lusch 2004). Involving lead users is often followed by an assumption that, once found, they will reveal the needs that others will have in months or even years.

A third way in which literature has dealt with user innovations is concerned with co-creation, for instance through activities such as hosting user communities (Jeppesen and Frederiksen 2006) or providing toolkits for innovations (Hippel and Katz 2002). Here several studies have found that the internet as facilitator has been an important source (Piller and Walcher 2006; Verona, Prandelli, and Sawhney 2005). However, co-creation implies that in some sense there is collaboration between users and producers. Co-creation is problematic when it comes to viral reality marketing since this assumes a collaboration which is not visible from both sides in the beginning (only the producers know for sure), and, as we shall see, leaves challenges in cases where people feel deceived when learning that their participation was part of an advertising strategy.

Even though a focus on manufacturers' benefits from users who innovate has been mentioned, what is required to understand viral reality marketing is neither the Consumer-Active Paradigm, since it is initiated by companies in the first place, nor lead users as these are difficult to predict from case to case. Post-implementation deals with a relatively fixed object where users can modify their *own* version. However, similarly to innovation, it is a concept which is difficult to pinpoint. The manufacturer's innovation is the means which allows the user to innovate. The innovation for the manufacturer is not the same as for the user.

### 2.2.3 Summing up

User-driven innovation reminds us that there are two ways of approaching the relationship between users, driving forces and innovations: It can be both a phenomenon, and an instrumental use of that phenomenon. Both are worth holding on to. On one hand persuading people to engage and create awareness is a method, practiced by companies, advertisers, and ad agencies. On the other, as we have seen with empirical examples in the first chapter, their method involves entering an already established genre of exchanges where references are continuously used to in- and exclude groups of people.

In viral marketing the innovation, in the sense of bringing previously unrelated things together, happens even before any potential company tries to benefit from it. Comedians, Youtubers, and journalists already participate either in providing entertaining interpretations or in playing detectives who try their best to inform their readers from putting bits and pieces of information together. Here we have active innovators who make references and content as it fits with their interests and professions.

But we also have companies who try to take advantage of these active reference makings, by deliberately adding content that conspicuously invites spoofs, as well as new interpretations. We need to understand the methods used by those who want to target others, but we also need to understand the practices in which such ads enter, their norms, rules, and challenge. This involves following unforeseen paths, paying attention to unexpected connections that turn discussions and content upside down, thereby following traces as they are on the move and are subjected to changes, alterations, and modifications. Therefore, we need to include both the phenomenon of people who innovate freely in the sense that they bring previously unrelated things together, as well as those who take advantage of this, like VisitDenmark and Danish Road Safety Council, who try to use users as a resource in creating a particular awareness. The relation between the two approaches to users and their role in innovation processes needs further exploration. We need to go beyond considering users as either a resource or the source, and instead look at how they are both. We need to look at how the innovation is something that is a product of the manufacturers and the users simultaneously.

## 2.3 Diffusion versus translation

User-driven innovation studies allow us to question the relationship between different types of user roles. In particular, the concept of diffusion, a classic approach in both communication and innovation studies, is discussed in comparison with that of translation, which is a direct response to and critique of the former. By juxtaposing and comparing these two concepts I will provide new insights and alternative ways of conceptualizing the interrelations between users, innovations, and driving forces.

### 2.3.1 Diffusion

As mentioned earlier the two-step flow model, that has formed a basis for many WoM studies, has been subjected to criticism for its simplicity. One critic is Everett Rogers who argues that we need to be more nuanced than the initial two-step flow model. Adaptation is a process consisting of several steps in which the adopters get convinced. We need to focus on the individual and his or her decision-making, and we need to see it as a process. Thus, adaptation comes from a series of decisions.

Rogers has developed and refined the diffusion model through many years. He has gathered data and theories from innovation studies, and from various research traditions. Based on this literature, as well as several of his own studies of innovations, his book Diffusion of Innovation (Rogers 2003) presents a model for diffusion that has been revised according to new studies. The book was first published in 1962 and is now in its fifth edition (2003). Rogers is not interested in how innovations come about, but instead in the process of adaptation. Each innovation starts with early adopters, who

are likely to try out innovations while they are new and not yet mainstream, growing until reaching a critical mass, and fading out with only the late adopters left interested towards the end. As in the studies of Word of Mouth, he focuses on single instances in which a potential adopter makes up his or her mind and develops an attitude towards a product. There is a range of stages the user goes through to make up his or her mind on whether to adopt an innovation or not. In contrast to the original two-step model, Rogers introduces a model that focuses on 5 stages in the innovation decision process: Knowledge, Persuasion, Decision, Implementation and Confirmation.

Knowledge In this first stage the individual is exposed to an innovation but lacks information about it. However, despite starting with the knowledge stage, there is something going on even before it starts. For instance, *"a Californian could walk past a house with a satellite dish on the roof top and not "see" the innovation"* or *"a farmer could drive past a hundred miles of hybrid corn in Iowa and not "see" the invention"* (Rogers 2003:171), the corn being an invention Rogers has analyzed earlier in his book (Rogers 2003:31). Thus, even though the model starts with the stage in which an innovation has come to the attention of a potential adopter, the innovation already existed before that, independent of whether potential adopters had discovered it or not. There is no guarantee that everyone will. Many people, mostly those with high education or higher social status, are among the first to be *aware* of new innovations. Yet knowing about an innovation is quite different from deciding to use it. Furthermore, it is implicit, that in any given analysis of an innovation, it exists, and becomes subject to studies, independently of whether potential adopters have recognized it as an innovation.

Persuasion is the stage in the innovation-decision process where the individual forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the innovation. In this stage the individual is interested in the innovation and actively seeks information about it. Here, individuals turn to other people, to peers, to confirm their initial beliefs about the innovation. However, a change of attitude is not enough. Since people might make it to the first stage, in having knowledge about an innovation, they might also be persuaded when it comes to a change in attitude. Still, this does not necessarily lead the to practice. Roger refers to such inconsistencies between **k**nowledge, **a**ttitude, and **p**ractice as the KAP-gap (Rogers 2003:176). Such gaps are often seen in innovations related to health innovations where people agree to the problem that the innovation promised to solve, but still do not, chose to adopt the innovation. As an example, Rogers mentions that many people agree, that tools to help them quit smoking are of great value, but that they might, despite agreeing, not want to stop.

Decision In this stage the individual takes the concept of the innovation and weighs the advantages up against disadvantages. They decide whether to adopt or reject the innovation. However, the sequence of knowledge, persuasion, and decision, might not always be the same. Sometimes people make decisions before developing an attitude. To illustrate this, Rogers provides an example of a group of women in a Korean village who were called to a meeting about an innovation: the intrauterine device (IUD). Right after the presentation of the innovation, the women were asked to put up their hands if they wanted to adopt. Eighteen women did so. The reader is not informed how many of the women were attending the meeting, but the story continues telling how they all *"promptly marched off to a nearby clinic to have an IUDs inserted"* which leads Rogers to the conclusion that *"in this case a presumably optional innovation-decision became almost a collective innovation–decision as a result of group pressure"* (Rogers 2003:178). The example is then used to illustrate how the women must have made the decision to adopt, before getting to the stage of persuasion where attitudes are developed. It is meant as an example of how the decision-making stages always comes, but not necessarily in the same chronological order that the model presents.

Implementation In this stage, the individual employs the innovation to a varying degree depending on the situation. The individual determines the usefulness of the innovation and may search for further information about it. Up until this stage, rejection has been an option in each of the stages. One can for instance reject an innovation in the knowledge stage by simply forgetting about it, or in the decision stage by deciding that there are too many disadvantages. However, a new type of reaction, which does not fall under neither the category of rejection nor adopting, comes into the picture here: that of people adopting in a way that *changes* the innovation into something dissimilar to the original innovation.

In the early years of diffusion study, adoption of an innovation meant the exact copying or imitation of how the innovation had been used previously by early adopters. But in 1972 two scholars W.W. Jr Charters and Roland S. Pellegrin discovered that innovations might not be quite the same for all adopters. In their study, of differentiated staffing, the phenomenon they studied across several sites turned out to be diffused in several schools. Yet, for the teachers and administrators, differentiated staffing was interpreted as many different things. Charters and Pellegrin (Charters and Pellegrin 1973) noted the degree to which an innovation was shaped differently in the four organizations they studied. According to Rogers, even though they did not use the term re-invention, this is what the variations in interpretations are about (Rogers 2003:180). They concluded that innovation should not be

implemented from the outside but invented from the inside. Thus, besides rejecting or adopting an innovation, re-invention is introduced as a concept, to cover the situations in which the innovation is adopted, but in a way that does not correspond with the definition of the original innovation.

Confirmation Although the name of this stage may be misleading, the individual finalizes their decision to continue using the innovation and may use it to its fullest potential.

### *Innovation in relation to diffusion*

Whereas Rogers model is introduced since it deals with innovation as a process (which WoM studies do not), the diffusion model portrays innovation as something that is already given. It is assumed to be successful no matter how the individuals respond. Everett Rogers' model of diffusion is considered a classic to innovation studies. Rogers' framework offers a conceptualization of innovation decision-making as a process that has a clear point of view from where to approach the innovations. It starts with the innovation and from there, inquiries are made into who and how people come to adopt. However, we can ask who has the privilege to define what an innovation is. The model enables the analyst to do so. It requires that the researcher defines or locates the boundaries of the innovation before he or she starts exploring the decision-making process. This approach fixes the innovation and ensures that it is already fixed from the beginning of any study. This leaves little room for innovations that are made up to be altered and modified.

Consequently, the innovation is fixed and stays fixed. It exists as such even before it meets the users. The driving force lies in the character of the innovation, while the role ascribed to the users is about whether they recognize the innovation or not. It is the process the user goes through in the decision-making process that diffusion puts into focus, whereas the innovation is analytically unquestioned and assumed to be the same. This excludes from the very beginning those who take it elsewhere or ascribe new meanings to it that were not intended or considered part of the innovation in the first place. Thus, when using the diffusion model as an analytical tool, we miss out the interesting shifts and turns of events that are very typical for viral reality marketing campaigns since that which spreads constantly is subjected to modifications and alterations.

The concept of reinvention has been discussed by Rogers as well as others (Rice and Rogers 1980) as an attempt to take into account and develop a typology for an innovation that diverges from what was originally the innovation. However, there is a larger analytical step to be taken, if we want to focus more specifically on the temporary open-ended and messy data that arises, as alterations and modifications are directly encouraged. In viral reality marketing, the message is often deliberately

made ambiguous and open to various interpretations. Here, variations are crucial to understand the development of campaigns.

When focusing on innovation, users, and driving forces, as concepts, it becomes clear that something is missing. Whereas in viral reality marketing the content shared is deliberately changed from iteration to iteration, the diffusion model explains that which is shared as the same, and as unaltered. Should things deviate from what they originally were, another concept, reinvention, is introduced instead, to analytically distinguish the original from variations (James G. Emshoff et al. 2013; Blakely et al. 1987; Kelly et al. 2000) Using the diffusion model will allow us to fix an innovation, a story, or a message as the same, but will not allow for the nuances of its multiple versions.

### 2.3.2 Translation

Actor-network theory (ANT) is introduced as a counter proposal to the diffusion model. The translation model is a direct response to the diffusion model. After having discussed the translation model specifically, I will provide a more general description of the framework of ANT and emphasize its value in making visible the interplay between humans and non-humans. This will be used as a theoretical basis from where to approach empirical data in chapter three.

Bruno Latour directly criticized Rogers model of diffusion. To make his point, Latour suggests exchanging the diffusion model with a model of translation. He explains the difference by comparing the innovation with a token:

> *"[In the diffusion model] The displacement of a token through time and space does not have to be explained. What is in need of an explanation is the slowing down or the acceleration of the token which result from the action or reaction of other people." (Latour 1986:266).*

In the translation model the focus is different:

> *"Instead of the transmission of the same tokens - simply deflected or slowed down by friction- you get in the second model, the continuous transformation of the token." (Latour 1986:268).*

Whereas the diffusion model attributes the objects that travel certain inertia, the translation model does not as such focus on the object but on the several interactions that affect its transformation.

> *"[In the translation model]There is no inertia to account for the token […] Displacement is not caused by the initial impetus whatsoever; rather it is the*

> *consequence of the energy given to the token by everyone in the chain who does something with it." (Latour 1986:267).*

To elaborate on the difference between the two tokens, he explains how the latter can be understood as a ball in a rugby game. There are, of course common objectives for the different players, although half want the ball in one goal, while the other half want it in the other goal. However, despite half the players aiming for the same result, the ball's route is not predetermined. Each time the ball changes hands, the new player tries to reach his or her goal with his or her own strategies, plans and expectations. The success criteria are manifold and can be measured from different points, while the diffusion model only allows for a single measuring of either success or failure. This analogy works on an intuitive level only. Should one follow it more strictly, one could still argue that there are two points from where to measure success; that of goals scored by one team against the other. Yet the point remains, that no action is given. Various unpredictable factors threaten to change the outcome. These are what Latour wants to emphasize.

Latour uses the metaphor of translation to introduce the concepts of facts and fact-builders. Drawing a parallel between the game and the academic production of statements, he emphasizes that the fate of any statement depends on the behavior of others. A researcher may have written the definitive paper proving that earth is hollow and that the moon is made of green cheese, but this paper will not become definitive if others do not take it up and use it as a matter of fact later:

> *"You need them to make your paper a decisive one, if they laugh at you, if they are indifferent, if they shrug it off, that is the end of your paper. A statement is thus always in jeopardy, much like the ball in a game of rugby. If no player takes it up, it simply sits on the grass." (Latour 1988).*

Thus, the total movement of a ball, a statement, or generally any artifact, depends on action, not on one fact-builder, or player, but to a much greater extent on that of a crowd over which the fact-builder, player, or ball, for that matter, has little control.

This point is worth bearing in mind when understanding viral marketing, a phenomenon that, as part of the strategy, relies on others to pick up messages, transform them (in viral reality marketing in particular), and turn them into something that is important and relevant for others. If a producer wants others to take up his or her message, it is necessary for others to act, and make it a decisive one. Yet it is unpredictable how it will play out.

Translation is an outcome caused by various actors aligning themselves, thereby creating networks to stabilize a structure in which actors speak on behalf of each other. Thus, ANT takes no interest in artifacts and those who use it – in themselves. Instead, it is the alliances between actors and the networks by which they are connected that is the focus. For instance, ANT will not speak of a computer, it will be concerned with what keeps it stable. The computer depends on others who consider it a stable object and recognize it as a computer, and it relies on elements such as cables, electricity, motherboard, screen, screws, programs, compilers as well. ANT is not concerned with what any object is, but instead on what new insights emerge from asking how the artifact is kept stable.

### *Actors and Networks*

The most important project for ANT is the removal of a priori assumptions (Latour 2005; Latour 1996a). Instead of entering the field with concepts that need testing in an empirical case, Latour emphasizes the strength in following the actors and where they go in order to map the connections they make. He turns things upside down by not using categories and concepts as explanatory but instead as things in need of explanation. This is reflected in the introduction to his book Reassembling the Social, where he emphasizes:

> *"When social scientists add the adjective "social" to some phenomenon, they designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon." (Latour 2005:1).*

"Social" does not qualify as an explaining element in itself, although it is often used like that. The social is not above the things studied and can therefore not be used as an explanatory factor. The social, as well as nature, technology, and science must be explained and accounted for. These categories do not have precedence (Latour 2006:209). ANT shifts around fore- and background in the sense that universality and order is not the rule, but an exception that has to be accounted for (Latour 2006:210). ANT does not desire to add networks to social studies, but to reassemble social studies by using networks. Its aim is to highlight correlations and associations that otherwise might be invisible. He emphasizes that:

> *" No explanation is stronger or more powerful than providing connections among unrelated elements, or showing how one element holds many others" (Latour 1996a:8).*

The relations, and hence the network, is the key point in using ANT as it highlights relations that many other sociological analyses miss. For instance, taking innovation as something that needs to be

studied, instead of treating it as a passive object around which actors make up their minds and decide whether they want to adopt it.

ANT shifts innovation, for a temporary network of relations of allied actors. It is not the innovation that needs to be explained. Instead, ANT is interested temporary networks of alliances, and in questioning what alliances of actors enable the innovation to gain and maintain its strength. Whereas the diffusion model takes the innovation as starting point, while exploring whether people adopt it or not, ANT sees innovation as an actor that changes others, while traveling, but also as an actor that is changed by others simultaneously.

### *Non-human actors*

Another contribution that is significantly relevant to highlight, is the removal of distinction between humans and non-humans. As discussed earlier, non-human actors such as algorithms, search engines and digital infrastructures defining specific digital platforms, affect users, while at the same time change, due to inputs based on the way they are used by these users. By taking both groups seriously as actors, we can capture how a task can be delegated from one actor to another across these boundaries. For instance, humans, thanks to digital infrastructures, can write one message for hundred people at the same time instead of writing one for each. Thus, the work of duplicating content is performed by the digital infrastructure. The digital infrastructure as an actor can show personalized content specifically for the user, based on a profiling of this user's interests, while the user contributes to the profiling through their actions[xxi]. Therefore, it is important to analytically consider the interplay between humans and various digital actors such as algorithms, scripts, cookies etc.

Latour uses three arguments to emphasize the importance of the interplay between humans and non-humans: If one wants to enter or leave a room, one can start building up walls for making the room, making holes when leaving and repairing the wholes afterwards. This is of course a very naïve way of thinking, but the point made by Latour is to pay specific attention to the work delegated to doors and hinges. Thus, non-humans can take over actions from humans. Latour calls this "distribution of competences" (Latour 2005:230). Work can be done by doors and hinges, but to make sure they close when you leave and open when you enter, this work can be delegated to a groom, and the work done by the groom can be delegated to a hydraulic door closer. When looking at delegations in this way, it does not make sense to make a priori distinctions without paying attention to the work non-human actors do and the work they free humans from doing. In addition, both the human and the non-human

can take over work from the other. Studies that exclude the focus on non-human actors tend to ignore what they do and what they make humans do.

Latour's further emphasizes the moral aspect as an example of how delegations can be distributed between humans and non-humans. A person might act in one way that appears to be morally correct, even though the person is not motivated by moral at all. For instance, a person might not want to use seatbelts in the car, but ends up doing it anyway despite his or her will, since this is the only way to avoid the annoying beeping noise the car makes until the seatbelt is worn (Latour 1992). There is a gap between what the man does and why he does it. Interests are translated as the driver acts in a morally correct way, but his actions might not have anything to do with moral at all. Thus, attention to non-humans may uncover a different story of why a driver acts morally correct. This leads to the next question: where and when does it all start? Often, we tend to trace stories back to humans, by directing the story to begin where the human designed the alarm to make the driver act morally correct.

ANT has a different approach to this. It does not seek beginnings and ends. It emphasizes the continuous work of achieving and maintaining the power of controlling others. It sets focus on the continuous negotiations back and forth between actors, both human and non-human.

### *The quandary of the fact builder*

When it comes to ascribing power, ANT directs its attention to alliances. Power is not an attribute on any actor a priori; It must be achieved. To illustrate this, Latour emphasizes the fact-builder: the actor who wants to make a statement into a fact. For instance, the fact that UDI is good for woman in Korea; that video recordings help to retain the customer's experiences, based on their observed behavior; that building materials communicating with the user is something the user benefits enough from to be willing to pay extra. Who made these inventions? ANT would ask: Which actors *turned* these into innovations? This is where the quandary of the fact-builder becomes relevant. As it concerns the challenges the fact builder faces in translating interests to make others agree that their innovation is in fact an innovation.

The quandary is about whether others are willing to take up the fact builder's statement or not. If not, the statement will be limited to a point in time and space i.e., it stays as dreams or fantasies retained by the fact builder. However, if people take it up, they might transform it beyond recognition. The solution suggested by Latour, is to be able to make others translate their interests to be *in line* with yours, so that their actions and alliances support your fact.

Analogous to reality marketing, we may assume that a viral video does not exist in and of itself. As a video is launched, it is not a viral video. Instead, it may become viral as viewers, algorithms, hashtags, and links all take up the video and facilitate the continuous growth of it. Likewise, each of these actors may transform it: A hashtag may juxtapose the video with other videos thereby creating similarities between entertainment and politically potent issues. Other brands may attempt to convert the attention to their own products, or the viewers of the video may simply find is uninteresting and therefore not share it. The brand using viral reality marketing, therefore does not make a viral video, they produce a video with a potential for becoming viral, while relying on others to make it so. Who or what then transforms a video into a viral video?

Latour provides an example to clarify this (Latour 1988b); Rudolf Christian Karl Diesel, a German inventor, invented the diesel engine that we know today! Or, asks Latour, did he? In his analysis he unravels the history of the engine, how in came into being, and what made it into what we know as the diesel engine today. He starts with the patent Diesel made to secure his invention. Diesel, along with the patent for the engine alone, did not *have* an engine, Latour argues. For it to become so, he depended on others. For instance, someone came along with a device that depicted, on a simple indicator cylinder card, how pressure changes with changing volume, as the piston moves inside the cylinder, so that the area on the diagram measures and makes the work done visible. Since this made it easier for others to see graphically how his engine was better, Diesel jumped right at it. Thus, Latour would say, Diesel lent his force to its inventor. MAN Engines later lent their engineers to Diesel with the assumption that after a few years, they would be able to resume their usual business of manufacturing engines, only on a larger scale. With this example Latour argues that both Diesel and MAN took detours to reach the goals they wanted. "*Sometimes fact builders are going to do away with explicit interests so as to increase their margin of maneuver"* (Latour 1988a: 114). Latour's story of Diesel and the engine illustrate how it is necessary, but at the same time risky, to involve others. This calls for new ways of telling the story of how and when an innovation becomes an innovation.

Like the story of Diesel and MAN, VisitDenmark, and all advertisers lent their forces to others who decided whether to share or not. Indeed, they encouraged them to fill in gaps and tell stories about what it might really be about. Therefore, it is highly relevant to look more into the quandary of wanting to have a fact established i.e., having a particular awareness created, while lending forces to others and relying on them to make it become so. Latour's approach enables a shift in focus not only on an innovation as a fixed thing, but to ask instead what stabilizes and threatens it. This shift is

interesting, and the questions it allows us to raise reach further than only those who share. In creating an analytical symmetry for actors without distinguishing between human and non-human actors, it also helps us ask: What role do digital infrastructures, scripts, algorithms, password protected profiles etc. play? I will get back to the role of these non-human actors. For now, I just want to keep them in mind while presenting the types of translation Latour describes because this group of actors is included here.

In the analysis Latour uses five examples of what translation can look like. Whereas four are about making others support and strengthen your fact, the fifth is about how to make their behavior predictable: How to keep the interested groups in line. This last task is by far the most difficult one.

The **first** type of translation can be summarized as "*I want what you want*". Here an actor lends his force to someone else, i.e., the fact builder rides piggyback on others to hold his or her interests in line with them. This rarely happens but it illustrates the option that the fact builder translates his/her/its interests according to others'. The **second** "*I want it why won't you*" might not be likely unless something else is in place. For instance, that the others have their usual way cut off. A classic example used elsewhere by Latour is a speed bump (Latour 1999: 186). If not in terms of direction then in terms of the speed with which they drive, drivers quite literally have their usual way cut off. It does not mean they cannot continue as if nothing had changed, but an additional actor is suddenly included: The car's suspension. Drivers are faced with a choice between slowing down, which is in the interest of the one who put up the speed bump, or risking having their car damaged if they refuse to keep their interests in line with the one who set it up. In the end the driver modifies his behavior through the mediation of the speed bump. This illustrates how non-humans and humans both affect each other. A non-human can affect how the human behaves. The **third** type can be summarized: "*if you make a short detour…*" Sometimes a fact builder cannot reach a goal straight away, he might then either convince others to take a detour "*if you come my way you can reach your goal faster*" or take a detour him/her/it-self to reach the goal eventually. Here an important point comes up: allocating credit, for it is rarely that simple that only one actor will have to take a detour. Actors who have different interests almost always cooperate despite these, with their own goals in mind. Thus, several interests coexist simultaneously. This also causes difficulties in unraveling and pinpointing exactly who should have the credit for an innovation as it has become so. Take for instance the diesel engine and the question of who invented it? Diesel? MAN? Both? The same goes for someone sharing a video with his followers on a social media – he might want to share this, but to do so, he borrows the

forces of specific algorithms that perform the work of making sure followers get to see the video. **Fourthly** and as an extension, Latour mentions reshuffling interests. This can be achieved by displacing goals or inventing new groups. The detour taken by actors to reach their different interests should be rendered invisible. It should feel like a straight line for each of them. Mindjumpers, the ad agency mentioned earlier for replying to the mother seeking her father, might want to make their own story while referring to the VisitDenmark's video, to distance themselves from it. But at the same time, they help the story that VisitDenmark made to become better known. For both VisitDenmark and Mindjumpers, it may feel like a straight line to their own goals of distancing or supporting the story retrospectively. This of course raises the question of multiple simultaneous and even conflicting interests.

The **fifth** type on translation is about becoming indispensable or establishing an obligatory passage point, that people would want to go through. The main point here is that to succeed, other actors will have to be brought in, and, to paraphrase Latour "*most on them do not look like men or women*" (Latour 1988a:121). Recalling the example with the rugby ball, neither of the players' actions makes sense without also analytically including the non-human actors and how they interact with the players. This is the main point in the fifth type of translation: that the actors in need of being considered include a range of non-human actors as well.

### *Innovation in relation to ANT*

Innovation according to ANT is a process that involves many actors who continuously try to enroll interest and control others. It includes non-human actors; it elaborates on the various interests at play simultaneously. It raises the question of who to ascribe the honor to, since not one, but all involved are driving forces. It is not there from the beginning, and it is continuously relying on being kept in place by actors who choose to engage. The quandary and Latour's example with Diesel brings forth another concern: How to tell the story of an innovation retrospectively, when it is not an innovation from the beginning? When does it become so, and at what point can something be considered an innovation? ANT approaches this question by pointing to the continuous vulnerability of innovations as always in-the-making.

Consequently, when using ANT as a tool to map interaction, we face an analytical disregard of the innovation. For just as social, nature, technology and science are concepts that do not exist prior to an analysis, innovation is not a concept in itself. Analytically disregarding the innovation as a preexisting category provides an alternative way of approaching viral reality marketing, which puts

action and relations into focus and concerns how innovations *come into being* through alliances between actors. As viral reality marketing campaigns are designed to gain momentum through actively participating audiences and unexpected turns of events, innovation, as something that is *continuously* created, is relevant to consider.

Madelene Akrich, Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, in joint contribution (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002a; Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002b) bind the concepts of innovation and translation together with the general principles of ANT, in an argument that points to the unpredictability of any innovations due to unexpected alliances. The visibility of the vulnerability is a crucial analytical and methodological achievement of neglecting the concept of innovation.

Akrich et all's starting point is, that often stories of technological innovations are concerned with success or failures. The starting point for such stories is often based on an assumption of the character of the innovation as successful. For instance, many innovation stories begin with an innovation having become a success, followed instantly by the question of what led to this. As a critique of such ways of telling stories Akrich et all introduce the model of interessement, in which they direct attention to the *active* work that actors do to interest others in stabilizing their facts, while the innovation is in-the-making. The model of interessement highlights the fragility of any innovation and directs attention to the continuous uncertainties that "it" undergoes to potentially becoming so.

Akrich et al. take as starting point two analytical aspects: invention and innovation. Invention can be characterized as ideas, projects, plans, or prototypes, - all that occurs prior to the first meeting with the user, whereas the innovation is the first successful commercial transaction or the first positive sanction of the user. Between the two extremes is a fate played out in accordance with a mysterious script. The mysterious script is what they try to demystify, by making what happens in-between visible. Success is not obtained without effort. In contrast to the diffusion model, effort is not ascribed to the designers, but to all involved; that is, human as well as non-human actors. In the diffusion model, innovations become widespread due to their intrinsic properties, in the model of interessement it is its *capacity to create adhesion between numerous allies* (human as well as non-human). In the latter, the fate of an innovation depends on the active participation of all those who have decided to ally themselves. An innovation is something that must be transformed and continuously kept in place. Effort is a continuous requirement. By shifting focus from innovations as having success as an inherent quality to the multitude of dispersed efforts from various actors, we are able to see how a project deemed to be successful by all experts can suddenly flop, and projects which everybody lost

faith in can suddenly get transformed into a commercial success (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002b:188)

> *"An innovation in the making reveals a multiplicity of heterogeneous and often confused decisions made by a large number of different and often conflicting groups, decisions which one is unable to decide a priori as to whether they will be crucial or not." (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002a:191).*

Akrich et al. try to direct the attention away from talking about the success or failure as a starting point, but instead focus on the intermediary actions, and the fragility of an innovation.

> *"Innovation by definition is created by instability, by unpredictability which no method, however refined, will manage to master, [(references Schumpeter 1934; 1939)] and isn't that the whole point in talking about innovations, the possibility of creating something new as Schumpeter writes: the translator, who brings together two universes with distinct logics and horizons, two separate worlds each of which would not know how to survive without the other[16]" (Akrich, Callon, and Latour 2002a:195).*

This allows us to see focus on the drive of the user in an innovation. Only the users are who or whatever acts or are acted upon independently of whether they are human or non-human. It is the emergent connections between actors that is worth paying attention to. The driving force is that of actors creating alliances.

This specific approach to innovations is particularly relevant in relation to viral reality marketing campaigns, as they are deliberately designed to grow because of other's engagements in filling the gaps. These campaigns contain enticing and controversial content to ensure momentum, and often this content ignites ethical as well as political debates, which reach mainstream media. They are driven by the continuous, active work of reference making from many sites simultaneously.

As campaigns grow through references to other campaigns, memes, and public events, the boundaries of such campaigns are often difficult to define independently of each other. As they are surrounded by great public attention, such campaigns frequently get resuscitated and become reference points for other campaigns, as well as ethical debates even years after they were launched. To exemplify this interrelatedness, a reference was made between VisitDenmark and a marketing stunt from the year before by the artist HuskMitNavn. Five years later it was spoofed by a travel agency, as they made their humoristic "Do it for Mom" and "Do it for Denmark" campaigns (Spies.dk 2016). These ads

[16] Only Schumpeter ascribes the honor for managing this to an entrepreneur, whereas ANT sees it as various actions performed by a multitude of actors.

made 5 years after the VisitDenmark' ad, hinged on a strong reference to the missing humor when VisitDenmark tried to combine sex and tourism. Viral ads can therefore rarely be distinguished as distinct domains since they rely on referencing, spoofing, or mimicking each other. The approach to innovations in-the-making attends to the relations that are made, *as* they are made. It attends to the *continuous* active work of reference making as well as the *fragility* of such campaigns. As this approach is less concerned with providing an explanation and more with making connections visible, the in-the-making perspective provides a specific focus on innovation as an orientation in the present.

Instead of positioning oneself where innovation *has* become a success, as for instance when concluding that something is widely known and used, and then study how it is perceived, Akrich et al suggest a different positioning. It is the innovation in-the-making one should be interested in. This is where things, despite careful planning, can easily be turned upside down.

This way of framing innovation can also be used as a response to the diffusion model and more general concepts of lead users, opinion leaders and first movers. Many studies of diffusion of innovation have taken these as starting points. But when it comes to viral reality marketing, the actors who, in the retrospective analysis, turn out to have had important roles, are often unexpected from the beginning. Companies might expect their controversial content to take unexpected turns, yet which turns and which actors that end up having played a vital role are not known from the beginning. It is important to remember that during fieldwork I had the privilege of following several campaigns before they were revealed to be so. This signals that both in data gathering and in the way we speak for such campaigns retrospectively, things come into existence that were not visible all along. I will return to this issue in a methodological discussion in chapter five. For now, it is sufficient to signal that in viral reality marketing, there is a significant need for taking the unexpected seriously and acknowledging how micro actors can suddenly become macro actors, since it is the very premise of this type of advertising.

### *Empirical examples of click and likejacking*

As we have seen in the discussion of diffusion versus translation, the framework of ANT enables us to approach viral marketing differently. One of the contributions of this dissertation is the insistence on treating both human and non-humans as actors as analytically equal actors in this type of marketing. An example is click- and likejacking. Just as the man put on the seatbelt, even though he did not want to, ANT makes it visible how Facebook users indicate that they like things on Facebook, without even knowing whether they like them or not. They also share things they do not want to share,

and recommend things that, when asked, they do not recommend. Allowing for the non-humans to speak and exploring the role of the algorithms and scripts, as well as the continuous negotiations between humans and non-humans, provide us with an interesting answer to why people do things they do not want to do.

A concrete way to illustrate the relevance of symmetrically paying attention to such non-human actors is found in Facebook viruses that make people do things counter to their will, and express opinions that they do not agree with. In December 2010, the security company "SCIS Security Group" sent out a warning to the Danish users of Facebook informing them about a virus[xxii] on Facebook. A week later, 135.000 Danish users had been contaminated. The virus spread fast[xxiii]. The growth was exponential, as each person who is contaminated automatically informs of his or her connections about it. If they choose to proceed and watch the video, then it even spreads to the person's friends' friends.

I discovered this virus before reading the warning, as I started to see a pattern: several of my friends within a few hours had updates on Facebook informing their friends that they liked a link. The links were not always the same, or at least they appeared to be different, according to the texts that accompanied them. Yet, to me, there were things that indicated that it was a virus. Firstly, the comments were all in English which seemed odd when posted by people who usually never write in English. Secondly, the links were often very sensational and consisted of capital letters and exclamation marks. Thirdly, they came from people from whom I usually do not receive such recommendations, meaning that the content did not fit with what I usually associated with the senders. These signs were clear to me but, judging by the number of people who participated, the signs were not clear to all.

A few examples of what it looked like:

Anna Hansen likes "LOL This girl gets OWNED after a POLICE OFFICER reads her STATUS MESSAGE."

Marie Jensen likes "This man takes a picture of himself EVERYDAY for 8 YEARS!!"

Michael Nielsen likes "The Prom Dress That Got This Girl Suspended From School"

Peter Sørensen likes "This Girl Has An Interesting Way Of Eating A Banana, Check It Out!"

When clicking on these, one is directed to a seemingly blank page that requires a click before continuing[xxiv].

I tried this using a test profile on Facebook that had no friends, since I expected it to be a virus and found it exceedingly embarrassing if *I* were to contaminate my friends. By using a profile without friends and hence without any connections, there was nowhere for the virus to spread to, except my own wall. However, when clicking, it became clear that the page did more than direct me to the video. The page showed a message with a tiny box where I should confirm I was not a robot[xxv]. Clicking on the box, or anywhere else within the picture triggered a script that would try to post a message to your Facebook wall. Technically this is done with an invisible iframe that follows your mouse around — causing you to click on an invisible "share" button no matter where you click. The share button is not at any time visible to those who click, and they will think they clicked on the "I am not a robot" button. In addition to the message posted on the wall, nothing else happened. In this virus, the users did not even get to see the video as promised. In other variations, the user was actually directed to the video and would probably not have noticed right away that the intermediary "share-on-your-wall-step" happened. This is what informants have told me, but it is not what happened to me. The only thing I saw, when trying to click using my test profile, was a message from my browser informing me that a script was blocked. Since the script was blocked, I was not directed to another site. This is important, since here too non-human actors play a role. I am perhaps more paranoid than most people, mainly because I am married to a computer scientist with computer security as his domain of expertise. Consequently, in my browser, I have a plugin that automatically blocks all scripts on pages visited. I must accept scripts manually before allowing them to execute anything [17]. Thus, all *I* see, when clicking on the error page, is an icon saying that content of this page is blocked. The reason to mention this is twofold; firstly, it provides an insight to why I am interested in the background for any such involuntarily postings, and secondly it illustrates that I too enroll a non-human actor, in this case, to cancel out the actions otherwise performed by the script.

This virus encounter made another difference between me and most of my informants visible. Whereas I was extremely interested in these viruses partly because I studied them, and partly because I have a preference for technical solutions, my informants did not care for such details. And whereas,

[17] Almost all webpages use scripts. They are used to support menu bars, to manage links, to ensure the layout is shown properly etc. On trustworthy sites they are no danger, however some pages are used to lure people to visit, while scripts redirect the search, install Trojan horses etc.

to me, it was obviously fraud that would have embarrassed me, should I be seen to fall for such scams, most of my informants did not think too much about it. They just got disappointed if no video was provided. They were at best slightly annoyed by not being able to see the video they had been curious to see. And what came even more as a surprise to me: often people did not even delete the messages with video recommendations that were automatically posted on their walls.

Another phenomenon I encountered is called likejacking. Here, the user is required to do something actively to be able to see the video. Sometimes they must like the video, like the page featuring the video, or fill out a survey, to be able to access it. In these cases, the user makes an active decision concerning the payoff between liking the unknown and making it known. Yet, they might not consider, that as they like the video *before* seeing it. The "like" is instantaneously passed on as a recommendation to everyone in their network. In this case there is no hidden script. This variation is used when companies want to gather information about a large group of people that they do not believe would voluntarily fill out surveys. Demographic statistic information about the people liking pages, becomes accessible to the page administrator. This information has value if someone wants to direct products to specific target groups. If a like is not taken back (by clicking "unlike"), those who like a page continue receiving updates from the page. This can be used to disseminate advertising.

Click- and likejacking are examples of viral marketing in the sense that a product or message is spread virally through fast-growing networks that continuously get bigger and bigger. In ANT terms, actors take a detour, thereby helping a product to be spread in exchange for users' access to content. The user does not directly want to share recommendations of videos that have the purpose of self-spreading. Yet this is what they indirectly accept. From one perspective we can argue that in cases of click- and likejacking, people voluntarily share links to their friends. From another perspective, the term voluntarily becomes problematic, since it is not the sharing that is the intent of those who click. A displacement of interests happens. Facebook users' desire for watching a video that their friends recommended, gets translated into their own recommendation.

To better understand such characteristics of these viruses, we must pay attention to the work carried out by non-human actors as well the mutual effects human and non-human actors have on each other. If not, there is simply no way of answering why people tell their friend that they like things, they (at that time) do not even know if they like. Neither do we have answers for why people allow someone they do not even know to post messages on their wall informing their friends that they want to share a video. Furthermore, algorithms and scripts are enrolled and mobilized to speak on behalf of friends

as they recommend content. The script and Facebook's algorithm ensuring that your friends are informed of what you like becomes an obligatory passage point for a person who wants to receive payment from a company in exchange for persuading people to provide demographic information and fill out surveys. It is interesting that so many Facebook users agree to take a detour around the click as an obligatory passage point, but if we do not take the non-human actors and the work they do seriously, if we do not focus on the displacements of interests and intermediaries that hold all these actors together in ensuring surveys, what these people are participating in simply makes no sense.

Paying attention to non-human actors can help us understand why people do things they do not want to do, due to a non-human actor, which translates and sometimes distorts actions. This puts an emphasis on how engaging with another actor can be analytically separated from whether this is what the actor wants in the classic understanding. Classic analysis might conclude that the user clicks "like", knowing full well that he does not yet know whether he or she likes it. It is a payoff. But not all actions are performed with consent, and not all other actions are visible to those engaging with them. Scripts and algorithms perform work that is not deliberately hidden, but still performed silently in the background.

Analytically *not* needing to make a difference of whether the user likes a video or hits the like buttons for other reasons, allows us to explicitly illustrate how the like button performs work, changes meanings, and distorts messages.

To translate is both about making equivalent, and about shifting. For two to become one – for an interest to become translated – there is a gap. For two actors agreeing to ally themselves is not just about agreeing (Callon 1986). Sometimes it is about the one temporarily lending its forces to another, sometimes it requires taking a short detour.

The examples of click- and likejacking are useful to illustrate the complexity at play in viral marketing. Focusing on the actors, and on the translations and distortions that take place is useful in understanding how simple everyday tasks on social media such clicking and liking while watching and sharing videos, can be much more than the choices of humans alone. Earlier I promised that I would be able to explain why people indicate that they like something even though this is not true, as well as allowing others they do not know, to post things they are not in control of, on their profiles. The answer to this is to be found by paying attention to the non-human actors as well as the constant

delegation of work between human and non-human actors. The strength of viruses is to be found in the interplay between human and non-human actors.

### 2.3.4 New ways of approaching users, innovations and driving forces

So far in this chapter, we have seen two opposing discussions of users as well as two analytical approaches to innovation. In the discussion on user-driven innovation, I have discussed portraying users as a resource for others who innovate, as well as the source of innovation. Empirically viral reality marketing places us somewhere between each of the strands. When it comes to viral reality marketing, there is both a company that wants to use users (potential targets) as a resource in spreading a particular message, yet it does so in a style and environment where the users are not seeing themselves as such. They are part of an already existing genre of exchanges and references where the individual's ability to bring new things together becomes the source of their own innovations. We do not need to choose perspectives on users as either resource or source. Instead, we need to be aware that they are both, and that this challenges how we speak of both those who want to create awareness of brands and those who just want to have fun, while also being the targets. Therefore, we need to approach the ambiguities between users as sources of new content while at the same time as resources for specific brands. This double role makes it empirically challenging to tackle users, particularly when they do not consider themselves part of a double role, as they contribute while neither being aware nor caring for what they contribute to in addition to their own interests. The contributions performed as acts of resistance also need analytical attention, for these alliances may at the same time contribute to the growth of campaigns and yet also to the distortion of them.

In relation to innovations, we have discussed how Rogers analytically fixed the innovation by considering it as preexisting independently to how people change their attitudes towards it. This way of conceptualizing innovation has been contrasted to ANT, which disregards it as an a priori concept. Innovation has no meaning in itself. Innovations always only exist temporarily as an innovations-in-the-making. In both cases the innovation is not of particular interest. In Rogers model it is there and need no further emphasis, in ANT it is never there; it is always only a fragile and temporarily existing actor.

Empirically however, viral reality marketing challenges how to talk about what is holding the campaign together. It may not be a preexisting story or video, but something that comes out of the connections that people make by referencing other content. But assuming that it is only always fragile also misses out of crucial aspects of viral reality marketing. For the story shifts from not yet existing,

to potentially being one out of many things, and finally it is also retold retrospectively, as if it was there all along. Therefore, we need other theoretical concepts to grasp the ambiguities of something that holds together a campaign, while deliberately changing radically at the same time.

As stories in viral reality marketing are made deliberately ambiguous, they are designed to shift. Therefore, we need to recall the concepts of shape-shifting moving objects. Objects that shift shape while moving are not only a matter of analytical concern but also of concern for how to construct narrative. There are, from the perspective of the companies behind the campaigns, two phases of viral reality marketing campaigns. The first phase is about sending out ambiguous content that encourages alterations and modifications; in the second phase the companies behind the campaign reveal themselves and try to fix the story, thereby attempting to rewrite history retrospectively. Thus, the story shifts from being ambiguous and encouraging new content, to attempting closure in retrospect. The companies attempt to retell the past by presenting a retrospective explanation that is hopefully so strong that people will accept that it was a campaign all along. This is opposite to the researcher's attempt to retell and account for what has happened. Whereas the analyst tries to *remove* the innovation, the campaign (or the predicate of content being an ad) analytically by being open to informants' various interests, the companies behind viral reality campaigns attempt to *reintroduce* it retrospectively. These two narratives are interesting because they remind us, that both the researcher and the companies behind viral reality campaigns are involved in retelling the story. It also calls for methodological contemplations when it comes to conceptualizing what and when a campaign is, and how to account for it.

In the following chapter I will go into detail about the environments in which viral reality campaigns enter, both when it comes to already existing genres, and to non-human actors. This chapter is a prerequisite for understanding the complexities in gathering fieldwork as well as analytically treating and representing the material retrospectively. Whereas this chapter has been concerned with users, producers, and innovation, the driving force has been less dealt with. The following chapters that introduce empirical data from fieldwork, suggests that ambiguity, conflicts, and incoherence are driving forces that both hold together viral reality marketing campaigns and act a catalyst for their growth.