

# Guerrilla Marketing : A Theoretical Review

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## ABSTRACT

Guerrilla marketing, in spite of its modest beginnings in the early 1960s, is today extensively used not just by small and medium enterprises, but also by big corporations. Guerrilla marketing, with its unique characteristic of surprise, diffusion and low cost has come to stay because of these advantages over traditional marketing. Over the years, numerous methods of guerrilla marketing have emerged. The most popular of them are Ambient marketing, Sensation marketing, Viral marketing, Buzz marketing and Ambush marketing. Despite its numerous advantages, guerrilla marketing suffers from some negatives, which have to be accounted before any guerrilla marketing campaign is conducted. The present paper discusses the aforementioned aspects of Guerrilla Marketing.

**Keywords:** Guerrilla Marketing, Ambient Marketing, Sensation Marketing, Viral Marketing, Buzz Marketing, Ambush Marketing, Surprise Effect, Diffusion Effect, Low Cost Effect, Word of Mouth

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## INTRODUCTION

When Ernesto Chi Guevara described the unconventional tactics and strategies used by him and his fighters during the Cuban revolution in his book '*Guerrilla Warfare*', little did he realize that those tactics would be used by the very capitalists he opposed, to further their capitalist goals in the arena of marketing. Guerrilla warfare tactics is a method of warfare that builds on raids and ambush attacks (Guevara, 1960). The Guerrilla warfare tactics are employed by a smaller weaker group against a massive military force. The smaller group manages to succeed only because of the surprise element in the methods employed. Before the opponents could realize what is happening, the guerrillas would inflict maximum damage and escape.

In the 1960s, many small and medium-sized enterprises in the United States of America adopted unconventional but innovative methods of marketing to boost their profits. These enterprises had relatively small marketing budgets when compared to large companies. Yet, they overcame this disadvantage by means of unconventional methods of marketing/advertising and also by adjusting quickly and flexibly to changing market forces (Levinson, 1984).

However, this innovative business tactic gained theoretical recognition only in 1984 when Jay Conrad Levinson gave shape to the guerrilla marketing concept in his book '*Guerrilla Marketing*'. Levinson's book, apart from laying down the theoretical foundation of guerrilla marketing, also provided guidelines for small businesses. Levinson's ideas were carried forward by Ries and Trout and subsequently by Kotler to bring guerrilla marketing to its present form. Today, guerrilla marketing is employed not just by small/medium enterprises, but also by big corporations. This is because the effectiveness of classical advertising has declined tremendously (Van den Putti, 2009) for two reasons. Firstly, consumers are today flooded with advertisements leading them to believe that they are constricted in their freedom to make independent consumption decisions (Kalliny and Gentry, 2010). To overcome this, they try to avoid being exposed to and being influenced by advertisements (Edwards et al., 2002). Secondly, the frequent bombardments of consumers with the same type of advertisement have led to consumers developing familiarity, which causes the wear out effect. Consequently, today, even big corporations are taking to unconventional methods of marketing / advertising. In fact, these days, guerrilla marketing is even used for finding out the niche (i.e. product focusing) in the market (Saloni and Jain, 2009).

## DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

To put it simply, guerrilla marketing is doing marketing activities the unconventional way by utilizing low budgets. This was the initial concept of guerrilla marketing. However, these days, guerrilla marketing as a marketing strategy primarily focuses on one of the four Ps of the marketing mix, namely Promotion.

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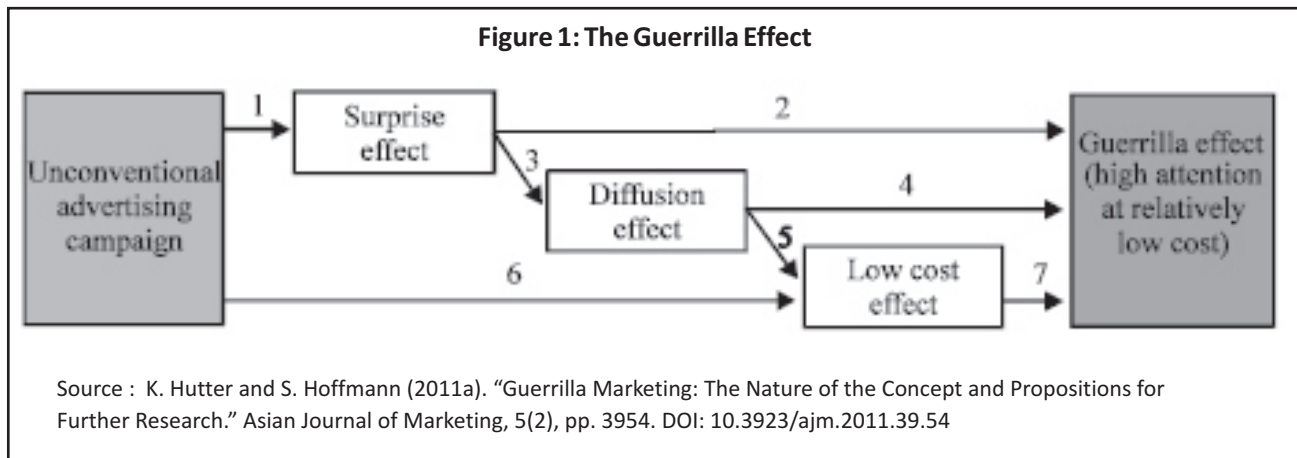
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From that view point, the guerrilla marketing concept implies an unconventional way of performing promotional activities on a very low budget (Ay et al., 2010).

## FEATURES OF GUERRILLA MARKETING

Guerrilla marketing includes, within its conceptual framework, a broad range of advertising methods that uses unconventional methods to achieve its objectives. Over the years, numerous types of unconventional advertising techniques have emerged under various names like Viral marketing, Ambush marketing, Ambient marketing, Sensation marketing, Buzz marketing, etc. All these types employ unconventional methods and hence come within the definition of guerrilla marketing. Hutter and Hoffmann (2011a) identified three essential features of guerrilla marketing. According to them, an unconventional advertising campaign to achieve the guerrilla effect of high attention at a relatively low cost must have the following three features namely (Figure 1) :

- 1) Surprise Effect ;
- 2) Diffusion Effect ;
- 3) Low Cost Effect.



**1) The Surprise Effect:** This is the chief characteristic feature of the guerrilla marketing concept. Every or at least most guerrilla marketing campaigns seek to surprise the prospective customer by using creative ideas with conventional methods. The attempt is to surprise the prospective customer with unexpected activities so as to draw their attention to the advertisement. Guerrilla marketing uses various techniques to draw attention of customers by surprising them. These techniques include the absurd (Dahlen et al., 2005), humor (Eisend, 2009) shocking messages (Dahl et al., 2003) etc. When consumers are surprised by these unexpected advertisements, they tend to process the advertising message (Johnson and Hawley, 1994).

**2) The Diffusion Effect:** Yet another feature of guerrilla marketing is its inherent ability to increase the number of individuals exposed to advertising without increasing the cost of the campaign. Customers who are exposed to the message are motivated to share their experiences with others (Rime et al., 1992). This happens when their emotions are evoked. The diffusion process can be through word of mouth communication or through other modern means of communication.

**3) The Low Cost Effect:** The third characteristic feature of guerrilla marketing is its ability to reach a wide audience with low or little cost. The diffusion effect by itself helps to reduce costs because consumers themselves help pass on the advertising message free of cost (Hunter and Hoffmann, 2011a). Further, many guerrilla marketing campaigns are implemented in such a manner that they require very little cost. For example, guerrilla marketing campaigners attempt to derive benefit from sponsored events like sports events by placing advertisements on the roads leading to the event

arena. This involves very little cost in comparison to amounts paid by the official sponsors.

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL MARKETING AND GUERRILLA MARKETING

In traditional marketing, one has to invest relatively more money ; whereas in guerrilla marketing, the investment is more in terms of time, energy and creativity. The second difference is with regard to the target group. Guerrilla marketing targets the individual, while traditional marketing targets the masses in general. The third important distinction relates to the focus area of the marketing strategy. Traditional marketing has the overall business activity as the focus area, while guerrilla marketing focuses on the customer. All these differences have made guerrilla marketing a more effective means of marketing than traditional marketing. These three important differences along with other differences are tabulated in the following Table 1:

Table 1: Differences Between Traditional Marketing and Guerrilla Marketing		
Sl. No	Traditional Marketing	Guerrilla Marketing
1.	Primary investment is money.	Primary investment is time, energy and creativity.
2.	The target group is the public in general.	The target group is the individual.
3.	Focus is on the overall business activity.	Focus is on the customer.
4.	It is based on judgment and experience.	It is based on creativity, psychology and human nature.
5.	Success is measured by sales.	Success is measured by profit.
6.	Designed for large businesses.	Designed for small / medium businesses.
7.	Marketing weapons are few and expensive.	Marketing weapons are numerous and most are free / cost effective.
Source : Author's Research		

Over the last three decades, different types of guerrilla marketing strategies have evolved. Some of the most important ones are outlined below:

**1) Ambient Marketing:** Ambient marketing refers to the guerrilla variant of the traditional outdoor / out-of-home advertising. Advertisements are placed at unusual locations in the direct social environment of the target group (Moor, 2003). Thus, ambient marketing is the placement of advertising in unusual and unexpected places combined with unconventional methods. The main focus of ambient marketing is to create the surprise effect by placing the advertising message at an unusual place. An example of ambient marketing is the use of gigantic cut outs of the product placed at a key location in the city centre like a bus stand, railway station, etc. where it is least expected.

**2) Sensation Marketing:** Sensation marketing is similar to ambient marketing, and the main focus is to create the surprise effect. However, in sensation marketing, the focus is more on the unconventional creative idea than the unusual place or location. Sensation marketing aims at surprising pedestrians in public places by actions that go beyond the scope of familiarity (Hutter and Hoffmann, 2011b). Sensation marketing is a hit-and-run type of marketing, which usually consists of irreproducible one-time actions (Hutter and Hoffmann, 2011a).

**3) Viral Marketing:** In viral marketing, once the communication process is initiated, it spreads like a virus among potential customers (Southgate et al., 2010). Thus, the focus in viral marketing is on the diffusion effect. The main task in viral marketing is to trigger the communication process using appropriate methods so that it can be easily diffused. The intention is to get the advertising message to as many contacts as possible. Diffusion either occurs either by direct communication addressing human multipliers who pass the message to other customers for free or in indirect communication via different media. With the advancement in Internet technology, many new techniques of viral

marketing have evolved. For e.g. video clips with embedded messages can be easily defused throughout the World Wide Web, and this is the most frequently used technique of viral marketing (Hague et al., 2008).

**4) Buzz Marketing:** Buzz marketing is a multi - dimensional communication process that involves sending persuasive messages out via buzz agent (senders) to buzz targets (receivers) in the form of word of mouth (offline and online) conversation and retrieving market research information from buzz agents on the particulars of the buzz marketing experience (Ahuja et al., 2007). Thus, in buzz marketing, the focus is on the diffusion effect and the consumer himself influences the decision-making process of other customers. The customer also serves as a market researcher.

**5) Ambush Marketing:** Ambush marketing is described as the practice whereby another company, often a competitor, intrudes upon public attention surrounding an event, there by deflecting attention towards themselves and away from the sponsor (Meenaghan, 1994). Simply put, ambush marketing occurs when non sponsors attempt to gain the benefit available only to the official sponsors (Bean 1995). The focus in ambush marketing is on the low-cost effect and attempts to keep the expenditure at low levels. Thus, ambush marketing relies on parasitic behavior, which enables it to achieve its objective at a low cost.

## NEGATIVES OF GUERRILLA MARKETING

Guerrilla marketing has its own share of negatives. Many guerrilla marketing strategies often stand at the brink of illegalities. Quite often, ambush activities cross the legal and ethical limits (Townley et al., 1998). Secondly, many guerrilla marketing strategies can back fire, leading to the creation of negative reputation. This problem multiplies when viral marketing techniques are used. When the marketer realizes that a particular advertising message is doing harm, he cannot easily withdraw that message from the target audience as the viral marketing process (diffusion effect) is not controlled by him. Thirdly, there is criticism that some guerrilla marketing techniques like ambient marketing sometimes tend to intrude into the privacy of people.

In spite of these negatives, the advantages offered by various guerrilla marketing techniques are too many that it cannot be ignored. Hence, while using guerrilla marketing techniques, the attempt must be to devise strategies to control the negatives.

## INDUSTRY EXAMPLES OF GUERRILLA MARKETING

The following are some of the well known examples of guerrilla marketing:

**1)** Sony Ericsson, in order to advertise its new mobile phone, hired actors to pose as tourists in New York and Los Angeles to ask people in the streets to take their picture with the company's new mobile phone camera (Kirby and Marsden, 2006).

**2)** In 2007, Turner Broadcasting Systems hired a guerrilla marketing company to create a buzz about its new cartoon television series 'Teen Aqua Hunger Force'. Huge LED displays of one of the cartoon characters namely 'Mooninite' were created and placed at different cities. In Boston, the device was mistaken for bombs leading to panic among the public. The transportation corridors were shut down. Bomb squads and police were deployed. Later in the day, the mistake was uncovered, and it resulted in two arrests and costs of \$500,000 for Turner Broadcasting Systems (Jeremy Langett, 2012). In spite of this negative, this guerrilla marketing strategy helped increase viewership of the program by 5 percent (Mac Millan and Walters, 2007).

**3)** During the 1996 Atlanta Olympic games, Nike was not the official sponsor. Reebok was the official sponsor. Nike not only purchased most of the outdoor billboard sites to display its advertising messages, but also set up its own Nike village next to the official sponsor's village. All this resulted in lots of people mistaking Nike to be the official sponsor and thus Nike saved US \$ 50 million in sponsorship fee (Seth, 2010).

## INDIAN EXAMPLES OF GUERRILLA MARKETING

**1)** Anando Milk, a local company in Mumbai, wanted to increase the consumption of their brand of milk among children. Children preferred juices and energy drink as they considered milk as a boring drink. So in order to change

the perception of children towards milk, the company came up with a novel advertising campaign. Since children were always attracted by supernatural powers, the company used a hoarding amongst a prominent building which appeared as if a child was pushing a part of the building with his bare hands. The hoarding was so placed that it appeared that the child had successfully moved a part of the building.

2) Monster.com, an Indian Job Portal website in order to boost their popularity came up with an inexpensive but innovative guerrilla marketing campaign. As part of their campaign, posters/stickers containing the phrase “upgrade” along with the name Monster.Com was pasted on cars and bikes. The purpose was to convey the message to the owners to upgrade their jobs and get themselves a higher salary so that they can buy a better car/bike.

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF GUERRILLA MARKETING**

Initially, big businesses had a tendency to ignore guerrilla marketing campaigns. However, its success over the years has forced every business concern - big or small - to take note of these strategies and employ them wherever possible. However, by implementing guerrilla marketing strategies, managers must be very careful regarding the particular techniques they adopt with respect to the cost-effectiveness of the technique. While all guerrilla marketing campaigns are apparently cost effective, there may be many hidden costs, which will have to be taken care of. Otherwise, the cost of implementing the campaign may out weigh the derived benefits.

Secondly, managers while implementing the guerrilla marketing campaign must be aware of the ethical and legal implications of the campaigns. Utmost care must be given to see that the techniques used are legal and do not violate the moral considerations of the society where it is implemented.

Thirdly, managers must be aware of the possible negative impact of the guerrilla marketing strategy on their brand image. This is particularly important with respect to companies who already have an established brand image. Highly reputed brands should, as far as possible, avoid guerrilla marketing. This is because the ability of guerrilla marketing to enhance consumer perception of high reputation brands is much lower than it is for a low reputation brand (Dahlen et al., 2009).

## **SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Guerrilla marketing is a developing field of study. Its theoretical base is far less developed when compared to traditional marketing. Hence, sufficient empirical studies/research have to be carried out to broaden its theoretical understanding. A large number of small and big corporations have employed guerrilla marketing with varying degree of success. Hence, future research must focus essentially on studying the reasons for the success/failure of a particular guerrilla marketing strategy. Future research must also focus attention on the ethical and legal aspects of guerrilla marketing.

## **CONCLUSION**

Guerrilla marketing has come a long way since its humble beginning in the early 1960s. Initially, guerrilla marketing techniques were used only by small businesses who were short of funds to run a full-fledged marketing campaign. However, today, guerrilla marketing is used not just by small businesses, but is also extensively used by large corporations because of its obvious advantages. Whoever may be the users of guerrilla marketing, its ultimate aim is to achieve consumer interest in the product through the various unconventional methods employed. Thus, the success of guerrilla marketing depends upon its ends and not on the means employed.

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