Squatty Potty Viral Video Campaign Assessment

I. Executive Summary:

Squatty Potty's *"This Unicorn Changed the Way I Poop"* was anchored in the main goals of increasing product awareness and sales through virality. It delivered: Over the course of a year and two months, the video garnered 156.9 million views across Facebook and YouTube, and 46% of total sales ($12.9M) were attributed to the campaign. Below are a few key insights and recommendations for future campaigns, informed by the data collected during the October 2015 - December 2016 period.

II. Was the campaign a good strategic decision?

If we define good by answering the question, "Did we get a good return on investment from this campaign?" The answer is nuanced: The campaign landed slightly below the industry benchmark of 5:1 ROI, at 338.5% on a $2.9 million marketing spend, meaning Squatty Potty made $3.38 in return for every dollar spent.

But ROI is the amuse-bouche to this story; we can see from the organic and paid view data that in the first days of the campaign, paid promotion was carrying the load: on October 4th, organic views were recorded at zero while paid views reached nearly 12,000. Without that early boost, there is no successful campaign.

The tipping point was on October 9th, when organic views began to surpass paid views. The pooping unicorn was starting to spread on its own. By mid-October, the organic-to-paid ratio peaked at 1,394x, meaning that for every one paid view, the campaign was generating nearly 1,400 organic ones. The paid promotion, paired with a great video concept, had triggered virality, and from that end, the campaign was indeed successful.

Survey data from the campaign dataset (found in a hidden tab in the file), shows that among respondents who provided an answer (excluding the 37.2% who did not respond), 26.1% discovered Squatty Potty through the unicorn video, beating word-of-mouth referrals from friends, family, and doctors at 19.2%. The video was doing the legwork of getting people into the funnel.

However, I would suggest being careful about making assumptions about linear attribution. We don't know how many touchpoints were involved before a purchase decision was made, and the video alone likely didn't close every sale it's credited with.

III. Demystifying the audience

The case highlights that women (specifically mothers) account for 70-80% of household purchases, positioning them as Squatty Potty’s assumed primary target. But this figure is more of a broad consumer behavior data for the category and not a reflection of Squatty Potty's own customer base. The Facebook targeting data gives us a better idea of who is actually resonating with the product.

Across every paired comparison, males convert at a lower cost per checkout than their female counterparts. Yoga males cost $3.75 less per checkout than yoga females. Howard Stern males cost $26 less per checkout than Howard Stern females. Vegan males generated 3,330 checkouts — 30 times the volume of vegan females, at a comparable cost per checkout

The Howard Stern comparison deserves a separate note. While males converted at $12.35 versus $38.44 for females, both audiences showed relatively high conversion rates — meaning people engaged with the ad. The explanation is likely that Howard Stern fans already had brand affinity through the show's organic mentions of Squatty Potty. They clicked because they recognized the brand, not necessarily because the Facebook ad moved them. Paying to reach an audience that the podcast is already working hard to reach is redundant.

This doesn't mean the mom market assumption is entirely wrong. Women may well be approving or completing purchases, but the data suggests wellness-oriented men were initiating them. The humor and the absurdity of the campaign landed differently with males.

It's also worth asking: who is buying in November and December, when purchases spike most sharply? I have two hypotheses that emerge from the data. The first is the gift-giving explanation: mothers purchasing for the household during the holiday season, which would support the original assumption. The second is less obvious: winter is associated with increased constipation due to reduced physical activity, dietary changes, and dehydration in cold weather. If that's a factor, December purchases may be driven by personal need as much as by gift-giving, and wellness-oriented males already engaged with the brand are likely candidates for that self-purchase behavior.

The lookalike and current customer audiences add nuance here, too. Current customers converted at the lowest cost per checkout of any segment ($6.44), which signals strong brand loyalty and suggests repeat-purchase potential— a second bathroom or a gift for a family member. But they also reveal an interesting outlier. Two nearly identical 18-54 lookalike audiences produced dramatically different results: one generated 940 checkouts at $13.10 each, while the other spent $14,140 — the second highest spend of any single audience — and yielded only 180 checkouts at $78.55 each. Same audience definition, and a wide difference in cost per checkout. This suggests targeting parameters matter as much as audience selection, and that lookalike audiences warrant closer monitoring before scaling spend.

Lookalike audiences performed solidly in the mid-range, making them a sound awareness play. But in terms of where the real return on ad spend lives, the male wellness-adjacent persona is the money audience.

IV. KPIs: What to watch and why

- **Organic-to-paid view ratio:** helps us measure the health of our viral assets. When organic views significantly outnumber paid views, the content is spreading on its own, and paid spend is amplifying something that's already working. When that ratio collapses—as it did in June and July 2016, when organic views dropped to zero, and paid views were the only thing keeping the campaign alive—virality has run its course. Monitoring this ratio in real time can inform campaign managers when to pull back on boost spend and redirect dollars elsewhere.
- **Cost per checkout by audience segment:** This measures efficiency. As the Facebook targeting data shows, the difference between the best- and worst-performing segments ranges from $6.44 to $78.55 per checkout. Tracking cost per checkout by segment on an ongoing basis identifies which audiences are worth scaling, which are worth testing with different creatives, and which should be cut entirely.
- **Seasonal revenue per promotional dollar:** This helps us evaluate the timing of spend. Total revenue divided by monthly promotional spend reveals when paid support is actually moving product and when it isn't. The data show that November and December consistently outperform the rest of the year in purchases, while the summer months underperform. Tracking this metric over time builds the case for a seasonal budget allocation strategy, with heavier digital investment in fall and winter and a shift toward lower-cost or offline tactics like OOH during summer, when digital spend yields diminishing returns.

V. What's next: spend smarter, not longer

The biggest mistake Squatty Potty could make is thinking this video will be viral forever. Viral content has a lifespan, and in today's hyperconnected world, that lifespan is likely even shorter. The organic-to-paid ratio is the signal to watch. When it starts collapsing, that is the moment to shift gears, not double down.

For budget, only 7% of the total promotional spend ($208,150) happened in October 2015, the month the video actually went viral. If it was me, I'd front-load spend in the launch window.

I'd also recommend redirecting dollars away from low-yield segments (like the underperforming lookalike variant with 180 checkouts at $78.55 each, and the Howard Stern audiences) toward Amazon sponsored search, which would capture bottom-of-funnel buyers already in a purchase mindset. These are the wellness-oriented consumers who saw the video, searched Amazon, and need one more nudge at the point of purchase.

In addition, I'd test launching a new creative in October to capture the fall-to-winter hike in demand, boost heavily through November and December (especially on the highest-converting segments) and shift remaining budget to OOH or IRL activations in summer when digital spend yields diminishing returns and people are enjoying the weather.