CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING

Mahabir Narwal
Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra.

Preeti Devi
Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Bhagwan Parshuram College, Kurukshetra.

ABSTRACT

With the regular and continuous developments in the field of technology, many cost effective and easily adoptable techniques are available to marketers to promote their products and services. One of these emerging techniques is viral marketing which is becoming a popular direct marketing tool for marketers all over the world. Viral marketing proves to be a cheaper alternative as compared to traditional marketing efforts. It also attracts smaller business houses along with the large and medium sized business houses due to less investment required by it as compared to other marketing tools. Therefore, marketers should understand factors that result into building positive attitude of consumers towards viral marketing before opting it. In present study an attempt has been made to investigate consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. To achieve this objective the data has been collected with the help of questionnaire from 200 respondents. Correlation and Regression analysis techniques were carried out to analyze the data. The findings reveal that there is a positive relationship between the independent variables i.e. informativeness, entertainment, source credibility along with irritation with the dependent variable i.e. attitude towards viral marketing. Source credibility and informativeness are found the most important attributes affecting consumer's attitude towards viral marketing

Keywords: Viral marketing, informativeness, entertainment, irritation, source credibility.

1. Introduction

Viral marketing is a business strategy that uses existing social networks to promote a product/ service (Leskovec et al., 2007). Viral marketing typically supplies its target audience with something of value for free. The basic idea behind the concept of viral marketing is the spread of information by word-of-mouth (Goel & Devi, 2014). The concept of viral marketing is considered as a customer oriented/focused approach which states how consumers spread information about a product/service with other people in their social networks. Viral marketing is used to achieve some pre-determined marketing objectives such as product awareness, increasing sales, brand awareness, etc. through self-replicating viral processes, much in the similar way that like a virus spreads from one person to another (Chaarlas & Rajkumar, 2014). A company that selects and decide to implement a viral marketing campaign shouldn't simply run it without adjustment. In reality, a successful

viral marketing campaign depends upon the understanding how to connect with demographics by presenting them with valuable content. The emergence of viral marketing has been witnessed due to the popularization of the notion that ideas spread like viruses (Gladwell, 2000).

Viral marketing may take the form of video-clips, interactive flash games, adver-games, e-books, branded software, images, text messages, e-mail messages, or web pages. Here the ultimate goal of marketers is to create viral marketing messages that appeal to individuals with high social-networking potential along with having a high probability of being presented and spread by these individuals and their companions in their communications with others in a short period of time. Generally, this form of marketing is used in conjunction with other methods of marketing. The success of viral marketing depends on the basic principle of providing the right message to the right messengers in the right environment.

The present research studies consumers' attitude towards viral marketing with respect to four dimensions i.e. message informativeness, entertainment, Irritation and source credibility (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). Message informativeness has been considered as an important dimension as it helps the consumers to take purchasing decision. It not only makes consumers aware about new products/services, but also informs them as how the product is better than competitor's offers. However, along with informativeness its quality is also considered as an important aspect. Message content linked with consumer's feeling of enjoyment play an active role in developing attitude towards viral marketing. Interesting, funny and pleasing messages are able to get positive response from consumers. Due to some reasons, viral marketing messages also leads to irritation among consumers i.e. excessive manipulativeness of message contents, use of such message content that annoy and sometimes insult the recipient of the message, all this builds negative consumer attitude towards viral marketing. Source credibility means the credibility of the media tool used for delivering the message to consumers.

2.   Literature review

Today time spent in visiting social network sites exceeds the time spent in e-mailing (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). As digital channels are deep-seated substances for marketing transformation, new marketing skills and techniques of doing are required (Klopper, 2002). Patankar (2012) observed that while using internet maximum time is spent for forwarding information, funny videos, profile related work only. As a result, integrated marketing principles with IT suggests new developed models for the marketing world using pre-existing social networking services and other technologies, one of the popular model out of them is viral marketing (Aghdaie et al., 2012). Viral marketing can be described as an extended form of word of mouth marketing (Swanepoel et al., 2009). Word of mouth (WOM) marketing refers to face-to-face oral communication in which a message about a product or

service is transmitted (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008), whereas viral marketing refers to electronic face-to-face propagation of message (Swanepoel et al., 2009). Dobele et al. (2005) renamed viral marketing as E-WOM and also states that it radically lowers the cost of promotion and boosts the speed of adoption, by harnessing the benefits of modern technologies like mobile sms, e-mails, online blogs, review sites, social networking sites, etc. (Goel & Devi, 2014). Kirby & Marsden (2006) further identified speed and the exponential dispersion of information using electronic media via internet as the main reason for viral marketing's popularity. Leskovec et al. (2007) proposed models to identify products for which viral marketing is effective and identified category and price of products along with recommendations of expensive products of interest to small as important ingredients having impact on effectiveness of viral marketing messages which results into more frequent purchases.

Viral marketing is an effective technique to enlist customers in a marketing strategy that can boost sales for the right product into the stratosphere and speed the shift from the stage of early adoption to widespread use, if applied properly (Thevenot & Watier, 2001). Nemanja (2012) identified two critical success factors i.e. social object (quality of message) and viral mechanics (act of sharing), which need to be satisfied in order to increase the likelihood of any marketing communications message going viral. Abedniya (2010) explored the role of social networking sites which has influence on viral marketing, and the characteristics of the most influential users to spread/share viral content. Viral marketing campaigns have a significant influence in changing the consumers' attitude towards brand image and positioning, thus, increasing trial (Dobele et al., 2005). Nigam (2012) reveals that positive word-of-mouth about brand helps in reducing distributing free products to target consumers as networking sites provides facilitating platform to build positive brand building awareness. Schulze et al. (2014) considered general brand attitude as the most influencing factor that affects the probability of a viral campaign to be effectively spread out by consumers through forwarding. Ferguson (2008) argued that viral marketing strategies can also be used to build effectively the consumer's loyalty. Today, viral marketing has become a conventional marketing instrument used by multinational firms in various industries (Schulze et al., 2014). However, viral marketing communication (VMC) helps to raise consumer awareness but does not significantly influence their purchasing decisions (Xavier & Summer, 2009).

3.   Research problem

Today viral marketing has become the buzzword. Marketers across the world are taking the help of viral marketing to promote their products/services along with other marketing tools. The message through viral marketing spread too fast yielding significant contribution as brand image and positioning trial (Dobele et al., 2015), awareness (Nigam, 2012), consumer loyalty (Ferguson, 2008), speed and dispersion of information (Kirby & Marsden, 2006). In this

regard, there arise some questions regarding viral marketing such as: how consumers perceive viral marketing messages? What factors are responsible for building consumers' attitude towards viral marketing? And what kind of relationship exists between viral marketing and factors affecting viral marketing. What is its impact on purchasing decisions? Thus, the need to conduct the present study arises to answer the above questions.

3.1 Objectives

- To study consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

- To study the relationship between viral marketing and its determinants.

- To study the impact of various factors on viral marketing.

3.2 Hypothesis

- **H1**: The perceived Informativeness of viral marketing messages generate positive consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

- **H2**: Entertainment positively affects consumers' attitude towards viral marketing messages.

- **H3**: Irritation caused by viral marketing messages has a negative impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

- **H4**: Source credibility of viral marketing messages positively affects consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

3.3 Methodology

The present study is confined to Kurukshetra district of Haryana only. The data was collected from 200 respondents using survey based questionnaire. The respondents represent male & female, different age group, income group, occupation, educational qualification etc. All the respondents had enough reading and writing skills to participate in the survey. The individuals targeted for the collection of data were users of e-mails, social network sites, blogs, and mobile phones. A five point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire (ranged from 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = undecided, 2 = disagree to 1 = strongly disagree) to measure consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. The instrument contained 22 items and demographic variables (informativeness -5 items, entertainment - 4 items, Irritation caused by the viral messages - 6 items, source credibility - 4 items and attitude towards viral marketing - 3 items). Statistical tests were applied to check the Reliability and Normality of the data. Correlation and Regression analysis were also conducted in order to see the relationship and impact of independent variables over the dependent variable.

4. Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics, Correlation and Regression analysis have been used to analyze the data.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table-1
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.755	5

The prime objective behind calculating internal reliability test was to ascertain the stability and dependability of the research instruments. Malhotra (2004) affirmed that the co-efficient varies from 0 to1 and if value is < 0.6, then it normally indicates unacceptable internal consistency reliability, Alpha coefficients value of 0.6 demonstrates weak; 0.6 - 0.8 shows fairly strong, and 0.8 - 1.0 portrays very strong internal reliability. Table 1 shows the reliability of the data, which was tested using Cronbach's alpha. As the value of Cronbach alpha is above the acceptable value (>.6), this shows that the data collected from the survey is reliable.

Table-2
Normality statistics

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Informativeness	-.657	.359
Entertainment	-.987	.559
Irritation	-1.157	1.840
Source Credibility	-.895	.448
Attitude towards Viral Marketing	-.1.135	3.715

For ascertaining the normality of data, Skewness and Kurtosis were calculated (Table 2). The values of both of these descriptive for the variables informativeness, entertainment and source credibility fall between the acceptable value of +1 and -1 whereas for variables irritation and attitude towards viral marketing, it is > -1.

Table-3
Mean and Standard deviation

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Informativeness	3.718	.442
Entertainment	3.598	.465
Irritation	3.548	.544
Source Credibility	3.569	.483
Attitude towards Viral Marketing	3.677	.520

The mean score of all the variables is >3. The average score on overall attitude towards viral marketing is found to be 3.622, which is also above the neutral score of 3. It indicates that consumers' overall attitude towards viral marketing is positive.

4.2   Correlation analysis

Table 4 shows the correlation value for all the variables and their relationship with each other.

Table-4
Correlation Matrix

	Attitude towards Viral Marketing	Source Credibility	Irritation	Entertainment	Informativeness
Attitude towards Viral Marketing	1				
Source Credibility	.498**	1			
Irritation	.143*	.292**	1		
Entertainment	.334**	.499**	.385**	1	
Informativeness	.442**	.455**	.308**	.582**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

It is observed that all independent factors i.e. informativeness, entertainment, irritation and source credibility are positive and significantly associated with customers' attitude towards viral marketing. Correlation value of attitude towards viral marketing and source credibility is 0.498 (p<.000) indicating thereby that both the variables have a positive and significant relationship. This relationship indicates that source credibility of viral marketing messages does affect consumers' attitude towards viral marketing to a greater extent. The Pearson value of attitude towards viral marketing and irritation is .143 (p<.043). This shows that these two variables have significant but a weak relationship. It signifies that two variables are affected by each other but to a lesser extent.

The correlation value of attitude towards viral marketing and entertainment is 0.334 (p<.000). This depicts that the

two variables have a significant positive relationship with each other. The relationship signifies that the two variables moderately affect each other. The correlation value of attitude towards viral marketing and informativeness is estimated to be 0.442 (p<.000). This shows that the two variables have a positive and significant relationship, which signifies that two variables are affected by each other i.e. more the information about viral marketing message, the more favorable attitude consumers will be having towards viral marketing.

4.3   Regression analysis

A stepwise Regression analysis is used to differentiate the contributions of the individual independent variables in attitude formation towards viral marketing.

Table-5
Regression Statistics

Factor	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Beta	F	Sig.
Informativeness	.442	.196	.192	.442	48.199	0.000
Entertainment	.334	.112	.107	.334	24.894	0.000
Irritation	.143	.020	.016	.143	4.139	0.043
Source Credibility	.498	.248	.244	.498	65.324	0.000

The inspection of the Table 5 reveals that source credibility is the major factor affecting the consumer attitude towards viral marketing with a contribution of 24.4 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. Its beta value is 0.498 (p<.000). This value shows that source credibility has a significant relationship with the dependent variable i.e. consumer attitude towards viral marketing. At second, adjusted R square for informativeness is found to be 0.192, which implies that the independent variable informativeness causes 19.2 percent variation in the dependent variable, whereas, its significance value is 0.000 and the value of beta is 0.442. It shows that Informativeness has a significant relationship with the dependent variable, therefore has a positive impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. At third, the adjusted R square value for entertainment is .107, which implies that independent variable entertainment causes 10.7 percent variation into the dependent variable. The beta value (0.334, p<.000) shows that source credibility has a significant relationship with the dependent variable. At last, irritation has beta value 0.143 (p<0.043) and adjusted R square 0.016 i.e. it causes only 1.6 percent variation into the dependent variable. This states that Irritation also contributes towards forming consumers' attitude towards viral marketing but impact is least as compared to other independent variables.

Therefore, the Regression results demonstrate that informativeness and source credibility are the major factors that affect the overall attitude towards viral marketing, whereas entertainment has comparatively lower impact on attitude towards viral marketing as compared to informativeness and source credibility. Irritation causes least variation into the dependent variable out of all four independent variables, however, it has significant relationship with attitude towards viral marketing, thus cannot be ignored.

4.4 Discussion

The present study investigated consumers' attitude towards viral marketing in relation to four major dimensions that potentially have influence. Perceived informativeness of viral marketing messages does generate positive consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. The study results indicate a positive and strong relationship between the two variables. These results are consistent with the results of the previous researches conducted by Zernigah & Sohail (2012), Danilo (2015) and Muzaffar & Kamran (2011). According to all these researches, informativeness is an important predictor of the value of viral marketing and plays a significant role in determining consumers' attitude. Thus, null hypothesis - H1 is accepted.

Findings also reveal that there is a positive and significant relationship between entertainment and viral marketing. This shows that entertainment contents of viral marketing messages does affect consumers' attitude towards viral marketing positively. These findings are in congruence with the results of Zernigah & Sohail (2012) as entertainment

adds value for customers and increases customers' loyalty thus, resulting in a positive attitude towards viral marketing. Thus, null hypothesis - H2 is accepted.

Irritation also has significant impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. A significant value indicates that irritation does have negative impact on attitude towards viral marketing as compared to other variables like informativeness, entertainment, and source credibility. The study findings also reveal that consumers feel irritated by viral marketing messages and irritation does result in a negative attitude towards viral marketing. Therefore, null hypothesis (H3) is accepted. Previous studies conducted by Haghirian et al. (2005) and Palka et al. (2009) are consistent with the results of present study. Hence, irritation does result into a negative consumer attitude towards viral marketing.

Finally, it is observed that source credibility has an impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. The correlation value between source credibility and attitude towards viral marketing signifies a positive relationship between the two variables, thereby accepting null hypothesis - H4. Higher the source credibility of viral marketing messages, the more positive attitude the consumers will have towards viral marketing. Present results are similar to the findings of Muzaffar & Kamran (2011) and Zernigah & Sohail (2012) as their findings also portrayed a positive effect of trustworthiness and credibility on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

5. Conclusion

Viral marketing uses pre-existing social networking services and other technologies to promote products and services. It proves to be a cheaper alternative as compared to traditional marketing efforts and also attracts smaller business houses or companies for promoting their products and services. There are four major dimensions that potentially influence consumers' attitude towards viral marketing i.e. informativeness, entertainment, irritation and source credibility. Source credibility, informativeness and entertainment have positive and significant impact in forming consumers' attitude towards viral marketing, whereas, irritation causes negative effect. Thus, it can be concluded that marketers should understand carefully all these factors that result into building attitude of consumers' towards viral marketing for promoting their products and services.

5.1 Scope for further research

The findings of the present study provide some directions for future. One of the important area for future research is to study the impact of demographic variables on consumer's attitude towards viral marketing. Other independent variables could also have been incorporated in the study like privacy issues, effect of incentives, relevance of viral messages, message clarity and the impact of permission based marketing to better investigate consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

6.   References

Abedniya Abed (2010). The Impact of Social Networking Websites to Facilitate the Effectiveness of Viral Marketing, *(IJACSA) International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*, Vol. 1, No. 6.

Aghdaie Seyed Fathollah Amiri, Ali Sanayei and Mehdi Etebari (2012). Evaluation of the Consumers' Trust Effect on Viral Marketing Acceptance based on the Technology Acceptance Model, *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 6.

Bruyn Arnaud De and Lilien Gary, L. (2008). A Multi-Stage model of Word of Mouth Influence through Viral Marketing, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, pp. 151-163.

Chaarlas, L.J. and Rajkumar, R. (2014). Perception on Viral Marketing among Consumers, *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp.1728-1733.

Danilo Cruz Chris Fill (2008). Evaluating Viral Marketing: Isolating the Key Criteria, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 26, No. 7, pp. 743-758.

Dobele Angela, Toleman David and Beverland Michael (2005). Controlled Infection! Spreading the Brand Message through Viral Marketing, *Business Horizons*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 143-149.

Ferguson, R. (2008). Word of Mouth and Viral Marketing: Taking the Temperature of the Hottest Trends in Marketing, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 179-182.

Gladwell Malcolm (2000). The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. Little Brown Publisher, p. 7.

Goel Deepti and Devi Geeta (2014). A Review on Impact of Viral Marketing, *Global Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (www.gjms.co.in).

Haghirian Parissa, Madlberger Maria and Tanuskova Andrea (2005). Increasing Advertising Value of Mobile Marketing- An Empirical Study of Antecedents. Proceedings of 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Big Island, HI, USA, January 3-6, 2005.

Kirby, J. and Marsden, P. (2006). Connected Marketing: The Viral, Buzz and Word of Mouth Revolution. London: Elsevier.

Klopper, H.B. (2002). Viral Marketing: A Powerful, but Dangerous Marketing Tool, *South African Journal of Information Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2.

Leskovec Jure, Lada, A. Adamic and Bernardo, A. Huberman (2007). The Dynamics of Viral Marketing. (www-personal.umich.edu).

Malhotra, N. (2004). Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation. Pearson Education Inc., New Jersey.

Muzaffar and Kamran (2011). SMS Advertising: Youth Attitude towards Perceived Informativeness, Irritation and Credibility, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 230-245.

Nemanja Rodic (2012). Best Practices in Viral Marketing. School of Economics, Aalto University. (www.aaltomediamark.org).

Nigam Ashutosh (2012). Influence of Viral Marketing on Brand Equity Building with Reference to Online Social Networking Sites, *International Journal of Computer Science & Management Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 01.

Palka, W., Pousttchi, K. and Wiedemann, D.G. (2009). Mobile Word-of-Mouth – A Grounded Theory of Mobile Viral Marketing, *Journal of Information Technology*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 172-185.

Patankar Tejashri Prashant (2012). Viral Marketing e-Commerce Business Model, *International Indexed & Referred Research Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (www.ssmrae.org).

Schulze Christian, Lisa Scholer and Bernd Skiera (2014). Not All Fun and Games: Viral Marketing for Utilitarian Products, *Journal of Marketing American Marketing Association*, Vol. 78, pp. 1–19.

Swanepoel, C., Lye, A. and Rugimbana, R. (2009). Virally inspired: A Review of the Theory of Viral Stealth Marketing, *Australian Marketing Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 9-15.

Thevenot Chad and Watier Katherine (2001). Viral Marketing. Georgetown University, Communications, Culture & Technology Program. (www.watier.org).

Xavier Low Jiun Wee and Goh Yun Shuang Summer (2009). Viral Marketing Communication: The Internet Word-of-Mouth - A Study on Consumer Perception and Consumer Response, Master Thesis in Business Administration, School of Management Blekinge Institute of Technology, Tekniska Hogskola.

Zernigah Kiani Irshad and Sohail Kamran (2012). Consumers' Attitude towards Viral Marketing in Pakistan, *Management & Marketing Challenges for the Knowledge Society*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 645-662.