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The Impact of Viral Marketing on Brand Awareness and Consumer Purchase Intention

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the effect of viral marketing media on the awareness of brand and ultimately influence the consumer purchase intention. This paper will also compare the effectiveness of the media of viral marketing i.e. Facebook, mobiles and emails. Based on the survey with the users of Facebook, mobiles and emails in accordance with AIDA hierarchy of effects theory the findings show that Facebook is most influential and effective media of viral marketing in Pakistan for creating brand awareness and consumer purchase intention. Viral marketing media has positive impact on brand awareness and brand awareness has positive impact on the purchase intention. From a theoretical standpoint, findings contribute to understanding of the value-added potential of viral marketing media and how it works. Design/Methodology: To answer the author's research questions a survey was conducted from the viral marketing media users i.e. university students, private employees and Govt. employees. To test hypothesis authors applied Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Amos 21. Findings: Our findings demonstrate that marketing communication through viral marketing media has positive effects on consumer's brand awareness and purchase intention. Thus, viral marketing media activities indeed affect the process of purchase decision. Among three mediums the usage of mobile phone is greater as compared to facebook and emails but facebook has more impact on brand awareness and consumer purchase intention. Originality/Value: From a theoretical standpoint, findings contribute to understanding of the value-added potential of viral marketing media and its effect on the process of consumer purchase decision

Keywords: *Viral Marketing, Brand Awareness, Consumer Purchase Intention, Facebook, Structural Equation Modeling.*

Introduction

Internet has huge impact on our lives. It has introduced many new concepts like social media, online advertisement and online shopping. Social media is a cost-effective way for interpersonal communication; people can interact easily with the help of social media and can share their views about different products and services on social platforms. Because of social media people become familiar with different types of brands, get influenced to buy those brands and also recommend others to buy those brands. In this way online and offline word of mouth is created through internet and social media.

In the past, marketing concepts were entirely based on just bringing products in the market. With the development of economy, organizations concentrated more on the needs of customers and market trends. All the technology changes that took place in the current years, can be easily observed in the products and services

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in the current market. To compete successfully in the market, all the companies adjust themselves according to the changing trends. With the emerging trends, communication through the internet has become very important for the companies. With the popularity of the internet, social media like Facebook, blogs and YouTube has also become popular. Now most of the companies are starting their marketing campaigns by using social media (Lusch, 2007). As per Salhab et al., (2023), web-based entertainment gives a stage to the present youth where individuals can share their inclinations, experiences and encounters. You can contact a bigger crowd or sell your items or administrations at a lower cost for each promotion in light of the fact that the huge sharing of data and correspondence gives valuable open doors to organizations. Jasin (2022) additionally give exact proof that buying intention of SME's products is decidedly impacted by viral marketing.

This paper aims to analyze the effect of viral marketing on brand awareness and ultimately influence the consumer purchase intention. This paper will also compare the effectiveness of the media of viral marketing i.e. Facebook, mobiles and emails. Based on the survey with users of Facebook, mobiles and emails the findings show that Facebook is most influential and effective media of viral marketing in Pakistan for creating brand awareness and consumer purchase intention. Viral marketing media has positive impact on brand awareness and brand awareness has positive impact on the purchase intention. Findings of the study contribute to understand the value-added potential of viral marketing media and how it works.

Literature Review

Viral marketing is a strategy to persuade the individuals to forward marketing messages to others, it has greater ability to grow and influence others. Just like the viral infections or diseases, the message multiplies; gets double and reach to millions of people in a very less time period (Kirby, 2012).

According to Moore (2003) viral marketing include all the strategies which use the word of mouth generated through different networks. When we talk about viral marketing, we cannot ignore the social media. It is very important dimension of the viral marketing. Social media is the source of viral marketing. In recent years, use of all the Social media networks like Facebook, YouTube, blogs and emails is increased as well as it gain a lot of popularity. Social media formats, social networking sites, blogs, email communication formats, YouTube, and many more are part of viral marketing. Most of the companies from 500 fastest growing private companies of the Unites states by "Inc.magazine" (business magazine) are using social media for their promotion and integrated marketing communications (Larson, 2009).

Stavrakantonakis et al. (2012) found that the users of social media are increasing day by day so companies can not ignore the power of the social media and its networks. According to Power Reviews Statistics on social media,almost 500 million people are active users of Facebook. There are over 3 billion Google searches every day and 65 million tweets ever day. People use the social media to communicate their needs,wants and complaints, to shrae their opinions about products and services and also to make a comaparison between competitors.

Three types of social media i.e. Facebook, mobiles and emails by different researchers are discussed below:

Facebook, Mobile Phones and Emails

Podobnik (2013) proposed that facebook was establised or founded in 2004 and it developed very fastly, people started using facebook and till 2012 it became very popular social networking site a with active monthly users crossing a billion. In this way worldwide users of internet use facebook reached to 42%. And nearly 60% of active users spends almost 50 miutes everyday on facebook.

Now a days,people are using facebook from their mobile phones and mobile user base is increasig day by day and at the end of 2012 mobile phone users who use facebook on their mobile phones was above

600 million. Brands need such a channel that can fascilitate them to reach to their customers with cost efficiency and in very less time.Facebook is such a channel,which fascilitate the marketers in this way. However, Facebook, who has a large number of user base but it is lacking in the sustainable business model.So it avail the opportunity and started offering its services to the different businesses.it becomes a win-win situation in this way.

Mobile phones are playing very important role in viral marketing in this era.Users are mostly connected to different social networking sites through the mobile phones. Social media is today's most used and talked debate which is defined as the utilization of web based and mobile technologies to make communication as a two way interactive session .

Mobile technology is one of the social media burgeoning marketing. Social networking sites gives a web based platform to create social relations and networks with people. These social networking sites gives a plateform to engage oneself to interact via internet, e-mail and also through mobile phones (Baruah, 2012). Wiedemann et al. (2008) found Cell phone technology has been grown so rapidly that it has opened new medium for word-of-mouth communication called Mobile viral marketing. Mobile viral marketing is actually an emerging thought that is being utilized for distribution or communication that place reliance on users to transfer mobile augmented things through mobile communication methods, mobile gadgets to other potential users in their social boundries and to vitalize these contacts to forward the content.

Email is a very important tool of communication and viral marketing. For marketers it is far too expensive to promote their goods and services. It's been thought and considered that any email that you send to your mailing list having reciepients which in turn forward that email to their families, friends, peers, collegues and associates.Chat-rooms, E-mails, bulletin boards etc makes viral marketing un-expensive.

Basically it is a very cost-effective mean to hit massive target audiences. It creates a sense of building a personal touch with the targeted audience as mostly it's been seen that email or any information is always forwarded to someone that they already know or to whom they trust. This utilization of third party advocacy is so strong and convincing that we as a consumer trust and count on the viewpoint of friends and family to whom we trust.When users are encouraged,they spreads more informationton and potential for more growth is created (Maxwell, 2002).

Skrob (2005) find out that the escalating success of Hotmail.com has shuddered the Internet marketing world inspired entrepreneur to build marketing concepts and to pursuade capital venture companies to finance them. The expenses that Hotmail bear of customer acquisition were too nill as compared to other businesses. The advertising message "Get your free e-mail at Hotmail", at the end of every sent e-mail, was not coerced locally as the consumers linked with other Web users outside their homestead.In Swedan and India Hotmail initially unfurl nation wide and then after that making Hotmai is recognised wolrd wide as most frequently used e-mail service provider. The budget that Hotmail incurred on their advertising was about $50,000 and within a time frame of only 18 months.The amount of subscribed users rose to 12 million that was in itself a record. The pioneers of Hotmail were totally in state of amazement by that rapid growth. The success can be associated to the free e-mail advertisement sent out and to the indirect personal involvement of the sender..Hence the very first successful email provider was Hotmail whose number of subscribed users increased day by day through viral marketing (Skrob, 2005).

Since the early 1960's marketers were trying to find out how they can create more awareness of their products and services.marketers were also interested to find out bout the brand positioning and brand image.So viral marketing proves very useful for creating the brand awareness (Michels et al., 2007). Porter and Golan (2006) found that Viral marketing is a very reliable source for creating the brand awareness because mostly information came from trustworthy sources like friends as compared with the traditional

advertisement. Findings of Nararatwong et al., (2013) show that that concept of viral marketing is based on dissemination of information. Because it uses the pre-established social media to create brand awareness.With the help of different social network sites,different companies companies publicize and promote their brands.in this way,consumers become more aware of their brands. Huang and Cheng (2013) found that a well known brand which has more brand awareness will positively affect the consumer purchase intention as compared to the product which has slightly less brand awareness. If there is more brand awareness of any product then it will automatically affect the purchase intention of the consumer. However there is a need to clarify that whether social media affect the consumer purchase decision process or not? where and how social media affects the process of consumers purchaes decision.

Consumer's Purchase Decision Making Process

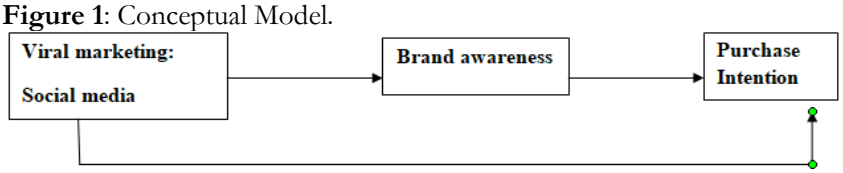
The customer decision making process consists of the different steps a buyer goes through while settling on a purchase decision (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). This interaction incorporate every one of the means from the acknowledgment of a need through the pre-buy look for data about likely ways of fulfilling the need, the assessment of accessible elective choices to the genuine buy and the post-buy processes including experience and assessment of the item.

There are hierarchy of effects (HOE) models in advertising similar to the framework of consumer decision making process. Instead of focusing on the stages of decision making process through which a customer passes these models focuse on the mental stages of the consumer's relationships with a specific brand (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999; Ray, 1973). We have used the notable and broadly applied hierarchy of effects model AIDA, which comprises of the purchase decision making phases i.e. awareness, interest, desire and action.

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Developement

According to the literature and this conceptual framework,viral marketing dimensions i.e social media usage is independent variable how it effects the brand awareness and purchase intention.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model.



Hypothesis

H1: *There is positive relationship between social media and purchase intention."*

H2: *Social media has positive impact on brand awareness."*

H3: *Brand awareness has positive impact on purchase intention."*

H4: *Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media and purchase intention."*

Research Methodology

This study will investigate the viability of the tools used for viral marketing. It will investigate which method of viral marketing—Facebook, mobile, and email—is more successful in Pakistan and how important each method is for generating brand awareness and a desire to buy. From this study we can see whether viral marketing is assuming significant part in making brand awareness and effects purchase intention.

Target Population and Sample

Facebook, mobile, and email users made up the target audience. The primary data was gathered using the convenience sampling method over the course of roughly a month. Targeted individuals for the data collection for this research project included Pakistani university graduates and postgraduate students, staff members of various multinational corporations doing business in Pakistan, as well as other users of e-mail, social networking sites, and mobile phones.

Data Collection

Data was collected through questionnaire which was adopted by following the methodology used by the (Aaker, 1996),(Shukla, 2011) and (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). Questionnaire was divided in to 5sections.

Primary Data

In one of Pakistan's largest cities, information was gathered through a questionnaire from Facebook, email, and mobile phone users, including university graduates, postgraduate students, and workers from various international corporations. There were 350 questionnaires given in all, but 280 received affirmative responses. These weren't included in the study since some were not completed or were not answered.

Secondary Data

Secondary information was gathered from past exploration, books, journals and sites. I have found articles and utilized the pursuit words "viral marketing", "brand awareness", "social media" and "purchase intention". The web search tool Google scholar was additionally used to gather the secondary information yet we were exceptionally mindful so as to pick applicable sources and journals.

Data Analysis and Results

First of all the reliability of all three variables is measured. The reliability analysis of these scales yielded favorable results. The constructs exhibited a high degree of reliability in terms of coefficient alpha**.** According to estimates, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of more than or equal to 0.6 is regarded as satisfactory. For all of the variables in this study, Cronbach's alpha is more than 0.70. Thus, we may conclude that all scales are reliable. The results in Table 1 reveal that all of the scales are trustworthy/ reliable.

Table 1: Result of Reliability Analysis.

Variables	Cronbach's alpha
Viral marketing	0.868
Brand awareness	0.764
Purchase intention	0.712

Goodness of Fit shows how well fitted our mediation model is. Table 2 shows that the values of CFI, NFI, RFI are close to 1, which indicate that our causal model is fitted good. Lower the RMSEA values, the better the model is. So according to results model is a good fit.

Table: 2: Results of Goodness of Fit of the Model.

Goodness of Fit Test		
Fitness Index	Required Value	Results
Chi-Square P-value	>0.05	.013
CMIN/DF	2.00-5.00	4.33
GFI	>0.90	.985
AGFI	>0.90	.925
RMSEA	<0.08	.109
RMR	<0.08	.028
IFI	>0.90	.983
NFI	>0.90	.978
CFI	>0.90	.983

The results show that there is a significant positive impact of social media usage on purchase intention with p=0.004 so H1 is accepted. There is a positive relationship between social media (dimension of viral marketing) and brand awareness with p=0.000. So it supports hypothesis H2. H3 is that brand awareness has positive impact on purchase intention. Here the results show that there is the significant positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention with p=0.000. So it supports the third hypothesis H3. Hypothesis 4 states that brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media and purchase intention. It is also accepted because p value is 0.004 and it is significant. It means that the viral marketing through social media creates brand awareness among consumers. The information disseminated through social media is considered more reliable than traditional marketing channels so create brand awareness and brand awareness positively affect consumer purchase intention.

Table 3: Regression Results.

		Estimate	S.E	C.R	P
Ba <---	VM_SM	.451	.046	9.753	0
Pi <---	Ba	.610	.061	10.074	0
Pi <---	VM_SM	.158	.054	2.904	.004

Frequency Analysis of Usage of Viral (Social) Media

Frequency analysis of questions that deal with utilization of different viral media are discussed in detail.

Table 4: Users of Facebook, Mobiles and Emails.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook users	280	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mobile users	280	100.0	100.0	100.0
Email users	280	100.0	100.0	100.0

From the table 4, it is quite clear that all the respondents were the users of Facebook, mobiles and Emails. From table 5 it is concluded that 64 percent people use mobile phones more than 3 hours a day. The results show that use of mobile phone is greater as compared to Facebook and Emails.

Table 5: Frequency of using Facebook, Mobiles and Emails.

Frequency usage of	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook Once a week 1 or 2 hrs. a	2 224	7 80.0	7 80.0	7
day More than 3 hrs. a day Total	54	19.3	19.3	80.7
Mobiles	280	100.0	100.0	100.0
1 or 2 hrs. a day More than 3 hrs. a	99	35.4	35.4	35.4
day Emails	181	64.6	64.6	100.0
	39	13.9	13.9	13.9
Once a week 2 to 3 days a week 1 or	101	36.1	36.1	50.0
2 hrs. a day Weekend only	1	.4	.4	50.4
	139	49.6	49.6	100.0

Facebook is on second number with 19 percent people using Facebook more than 3 hours a day and 80 percent use 1 or 2 hours a day while Emails has the lowest use of 13.9 percent once a week. From the results shown in Table 6 it is concluded that purchase intention of 41% people is affected through Facebook, 17.5% purchase intention is affected through mobile phone and 9.3% purchase intention is affected through Emails.

Table 6: Effect on PURCHASE Intention at Facebook, Mobiles and Emails.

Purchase intention at	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook Yes No	115 165	41.1 58.9	41.1 58.9	41.1 100.0
Mobiles				
Yes No	49 231	17.5 82.5	17.5 82.5	17.5 100
Emails				
Yes No	26 254	9.3 90.7	9.3 90.7	9.3 90.7

Discussion and Marketing Implications

The purpose for this study was to identify the effect of viral marketing in the form of social media on brand awareness and purchase intention. It also measures the effectiveness of media of viral marketing i.e. Facebook, Mobiles, and Emails. The results from our quantitative research show that when we analyze three Mediums of viral marketing, we came to know that usage of mobile phone is greater as compared to Facebook and Emails. But Facebook has more impact on brand awareness and consumer purchase intention in Pakistan. So we can say that Facebook is most influential and effective media of viral marketing in Pakistan for creating brand awareness and consumer purchase intention.

Our results showed that in students, viral marketing has more impact on brand awareness as compared to consumer purchase intention. While in private job holders viral marketing has equal impact on brand awareness as well as purchase intention. And it is proved that brand awareness mediates the relationship between the viral marketing and purchase intention. By this study, managers will come to know how much influential and powerful is viral marketing for advertisement and promotional purposes, as well as for creating the brand awareness and consumer purchase intention. It is necessary for managers to include the viral marketing in to their marketing strategies.

Secondly, it will help the managers to know about the most effective tool of viral marketing from the Face book, mobiles and Emails. They will come to know which tool from the Facebook, mobiles and Emails is more effective for creating brand awareness and consumer purchase intention.

Limitations and Future Research

I have only concentrated at the viability of three viral marketing tools: Facebook, mobile devices, and emails. Future research on the efficacy of additional viral marketing methods is necessary. Due to a shortage of time, I was only able to research one aspect of viral marketing's effect on brand recognition and buy intent. It is important to investigate further aspects of viral marketing. Future research may examine its effect on customer buying decisions. This study, which I only completed in one Pakistani metropolis, should also be carried out in Pakistan's other major cities.

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