

EMPIRICAL STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING VIRAL MARKETING

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Abstract

The present study has strived to trace the factors responsible for facilitating viral marketing and assess the usability and effectiveness of viral marketing in increasing the sales and brand awareness.

Many techniques are used to reach to potential consumer and the success of viral marketing depends on many factors. In this study a causal model has been proposed wherein viral dynamics are explored and based on the survey of younger generation, the author has verified the structural and attitudes on viral dynamics. The attitude of general public is that the information given in viral marketing is useful for making purchasing decision. This has been concluded in this study that businesses need to use a variety of viral marketing techniques in order to boost their sale as it is necessary that individual should integrate their relationship with the network which is critical in the receiving and forwarding process.

Introduction

The concept of marketing is evolving with the introduction of internet and various media and platform exist for marketing our goods and service. It is therefore necessary that strategies should be redefined in accordance with the behaviour of consumer enabling marketers to be successful in their respective field.

The statistics presented by statista.com states that the digital population worldwide as on October 2018 is almost 4.2 billion people who are active internet users and 3.4 billion were social media users. China, India and the United States rank ahead all other countries in terms of internet users.

This is resulting in the use of more online advertising to reach out to potential consumer and online advertising format which includes, email, social media, viral marketing, youtube, forums can be used to create brand awareness and encourage them to prefer the particular brand. Among all this media the use of viral marketing uses the consumer themselves to encourage product preference to others (merman,2007)

The aim of the this study is to investigate two aspect, the first is to identify effect of viral marketing on promoting brand awareness and the second, is to assess the factors responsible for promoting sales of product or service. This has been explore by way of use of questionnaire.

Background

Earlier emphasis of marketing was on how to identify and attract the potential consumer available from the market. When the economy is developing, organizations had to become more customer oriented and the change of technology has affected how the particular product and service are perceived in the market due to availability of various substitutes in the market and the marketing communication in the internet market became important and therefore digital marketing which includes, email marketing, blog marketing, social media marketing became important ways to market themselves (Lusch, 2007). Viral Marketing is treated as a strategy to boost individual to pass on the message to other people and it a large number of receivers further forward it to a large number of people it increase the popularity and message grows quickly. Viral marketing off the Internet is known as “Word of Mouth”(Scott, 2007).

Research Finding

In the present empirical study, information has been collected by way of questionnaire given to email users. Homogeneous Respondents were selected to control demographic feature and characteristic which might influence viral dynamics. We obtained a final sample of 102 individual as for the composition of the sample 59.80% were male and 40.19 % Female. 55.88% were aged between 24-28 and 18.63% were aged between 18 to 24 and 25.49% were over 29 years of age. From the research it has been found that 94.12 % of respondents use the internet every day and 92.16% of people spend more than 10 hours a week on the internet. When enquired about their primary email account we have found that 42.16 % use gmail account, 40.20 % use yahoo and 12.75 use hotmail and rest use other account. We have found that 91.18% are member of an online social network. Respondents have ranked the social network site in the following order Whats app, facebook, instagram, twitter and others. 70.59% of respondents were aware of the internet advertisement. And 34.12 % of the people have claimed that they have clicked through an advertisement which has led to making purchase. On being questioned about how do you feel about advertisers targeting you with information from your social network profile only 41.17% reported that they get disturbed but rest of the people are either neutral of comfortable with it.

The question pertaining to assess the involvement of Consumers with others are asked and their answer is given hereunder :

Question	Attributes	%
How likely are you to join a group, within your social network, based on your interest in that topic?	Very Likely	17.65
	Likely	20.59
	Somewhat Likely	27.45
	Not Too Likely	26.47
	Never	7.84
Do you link or stream audio, video or website links to your profile?	Very Likely	15.69
	Likely	21.57
	Somewhat Likely	34.31
	Not Too Likely	19.61
	Never	8.82
Have you prolonged your visit on another person' profile to listen to	yes within past week	41.18
	yes within past month;	23.53

Question	Attributes	%
the audio streamed, watch a video or visit a link?	yes within past 6 months	10.78
	yes within past year	12.75
	never	11.76
Have you forward to tell a friend about an audio, video or link that interests you?	yes within past week	47.06
	yes within past month;	25.49
	yes within past 6 months	5.88
	yes within past year	14.71
	never	6.86

It can be pointed from the above mentioned table :

1. Majority of the respondents are likely to join a group, without social network based on their interest in that topic.
2. Majority of respondents link or stream audio, video or website links to their profile.
3. Majority of the respondents get distracted and listen to the audio streamed, watch a video or visit a link and thereby prolonged their visit on another persons profile.
4. Majority of the respondents do forward and tell a friend about an audio, video or link that interest them

To know the factor which influence the respondent in engaging themselves in the viral marketing is given in the tabular form :

Question	Attributes	%
When an advert catches your eye, what makes you click on it? (Check all that applies)	Inactive	20.59
	Fun	20.59
	Subversive	37.25
	Exciting	2.94
	Celebrity	6.86
	Endorseemnt	2.94
	Colourful	4.90
	Video Content	24.51
what will be the main motivator for you to spread messages to others on internet	free bies,	14.71
	monetary incentive	11.76
	concerned about an issue	14.71
	interesting and fun contents	45.10
	exchange of information	13.73

From the above mentioned table it is clear Majority of the respondents have given ranking in the following order which catch their interest and makes them click on it : Subversive (political/ rebellious) content, video content, fun, exciting, celebrities information, colourful content, endorsement etc

5. Majority of the respondents have opined they treat the following order as a motivator to spread messages to others on internet : Interesting and fun contents, concerned about an issue, free bies, exchange of information and last is monetary incentive

On various types of viral marketing, an opinion of the respondents are summarized hereinbelow :

Sr. no.	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree no Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagre e	Somew hat disagree
1.	Internet word of mouth marketing							
2.	I trust word-of-mouth communication on th	10.78	24.51	24.51	14.71	13.73	7.84	3.92

	internet							
3.	It is important for me to hear about the experiences of others before buying a product/service	25.49	48.04	17.65	1.96	6.86	0.00	0.00
4.	I am more affected by negative comments about products as compared to positive comment	14.71	33.33	26.47	18.63	5.88	0.98	0.00
5.	I usually want to be the first to try out a new product/service	9.80	11.76	14.71	14.71	25.49	17.65	5.88
6.	It makes me feel good to be able spread messages about products/services to my friends on the internet	8.82	27.45	28.43	17.65	10.78	5.88	0.98
7.	Through internet word-of-mouth, I learnt more about brands of products/services	13.73	41.18	31.37	8.82	2.94	0.98	0.98
8.	I am more inclined to purchase products/services when the messages were passed by people I know	22.55	43.14	20.59	9.80	0.98	1.96	0.98
9.	I have actually purchased a product/service after hearing about it from the internet	8.82	38.24	27.45	6.86	7.84	3.92	6.86
10.	The internet word-of-mouth helps to strengthen my belief and commitment towards a brand of product/service	5.88	36.27	34.31	14.71	4.90	2.94	0.98
11.	I trust more in what people are saying about services than products	7.84	26.47	30.39	19.61	8.82	5.88	0.98
On Email – Marketing								
12.	I often use E-mail to stay in touch with my friends and relatives	32.35	22.55	23.53	4.90	6.86	4.90	4.90
13.	I generally trust the contents of e-mails I receive from people I know	24.51	27.45	16.67	12.75	10.78	4.90	2.94
14.	I view e-mails from unknown parties as spam	30.39	27.45	17.65	9.80	3.92	4.90	5.88
15.	I do not open up e-mails from unknown parties	44.12	25.49	15.69	4.90	3.92	3.92	1.96
16.	I have the habit of forwarding e-mails to people I know whom I feel will be interested in the contents	8.82	15.69	24.51	10.78	15.69	8.82	15.69
17.	I usually mass forward e-mails with "financial benefits" described in the mail	2.94	6.86	8.82	14.71	13.73	12.75	40.20
Video Marketing								
19.	I frequently watch videos on the internet	24.51	28.43	34.31	5.88	5.88	0.98	0.00
20.	I am aware of marketing/advertising messages present in viral videos	19.61	28.43	35.29	11.76	1.96	1.96	0.98
21.	Funny videos help me to remember a brand better	18.63	41.18	25.49	8.82	3.92	0.00	0.00
22.	I have spread video links to my friends/relatives before	21.57	31.37	27.45	7.84	7.84	0.00	3.92
Blog Marketing								
24.	I like to read others blogs	9.80	28.43	32.35	12.75	9.80	3.92	2.94
25.	I generally believe what people write in their blogs	5.88	19.61	34.31	16.67	15.69	4.90	2.94
26.	I do not think that people should blog to advertise stuff	3.92	15.69	29.41	29.41	11.76	6.86	2.94
Social Media Marketing								
28.	I like to stay in touch with my friends on social network sites (e.g. Facebook, Friendster, Multiply)	34.31	26.47	28.43	2.94	4.90	0.98	1.96
29.	I am aware of advertising messages on these sites	26.47	31.37	24.51	9.80	4.90	0.98	1.96
30.	I usually view messages/video links sent, posted or recommended from my friends and relatives	33.33	29.41	15.69	13.73	5.88	1.96	0.00
31.	I visit forums when I am free	13.73	30.39	25.49	9.80	11.76	4.90	3.92
32.	I trust what other people are relating from their experiences in forums	7.84	19.61	32.35	22.55	7.84	6.86	2.94
33.	It is important for me to listen to what others feedback in forums before deciding if a product/service is good	14.71	32.35	30.39	12.75	2.94	2.94	3.92

Conclusion

As the results show, finding provides empirical support for hypothesis as consumer connectedness impacts the frequency of forwarding messages and it also state that individuals who frequently use email and other internet media as a means of communication also forward the largest number of viral messages.

It is also pointed out that positive attitude to viral messages is also the determinant of the frequency with which individuals open or forward these messages.

Additionally from the questionnaire it has been found that consumers rely more on word of mouth especially given by their known one and trust them and they get affected by negative comments about products more than positive comment and very few try out a new product and service but once they try, they spread messages about product / services to their friends on the interest and through word of mouth they learnt more about brands and it strengthens their belief and commitment towards a brand.

From the research it has been further traced that Consumer use email to stay in touch with friends and relatives though this trend is on declining and they trust the contents of email they receive from people they know and generally consider email from others as spam and they do not open their mail from unknown parties and very few are in habit of forwarding email to people who are interested in the contents even if it is with financial benefits

It has been found that lately consumers are watching more videos on the interest and they are aware of advertising messages present in the viral videos and funny vides help them to remember a brand better and they spread video links to their friends and relatives.

Regarding blog marketing, finding concludes that consumers do read other blogs and believe what people write in their blogs and still believes that people didn't blog to advertise stuff

Out of all other media, it was found that consumers like to stay in touch with their friends on social network sites (e.g whats app, facebook, instagram, twitter and others and they are aware of advertising messages on these sites and they usually view messages/ video links set, posted or recommended from my friends and relatives and they visit forums of social media when they are free. Consumer also trust what other people are relating from their experiences in forums and it is important for them to listen to what others give feedback in forums before deciding it a product/ service in good.

Theoretical implications

One of the key factor in defining viral marketing is the pass on of a marketing messages to other. In this process it is necessary to know how and why people get engaged in the viral marketing and what influence them to forward this to others.

In the current study, the viral dynamics, motivators and factors determined. Findings suggested that the more often consumers receive viral message, the more they forward it to others. Additionally, this is reinforced if sent by known person and if they frequently open those message and thus it plays a mediating role in the dynamics of viral marketing and we can explore factors which contribute to individuals actually opening message.

Managerial implications

Viral marketing make some sense especially when integrated instead of isolated to improve brand and increase mass market brand awareness, all at a lower cost in comparison to conventional media campaigns. In this process consumer themselves are utilized as a means of passing the information and it implies that because of the ties with the one who send, the person who is receiving the message is more willing to open it. Viral marketing hence proper justification to consider this as a effective marketing media and is organizations are going to be benefitted as they can reach target public. It is to be pointed that consumers are devoting more time on online as compared to offline media and which makes it highly appealing opinion without any risk.

However, if viral marketing to be proved as effective it is to be ensure that messages must be viral, in other words it must be such that it should compel the receiver to open and forward it. As marketers seek to reach maximum number of people, the target consumers in viral marketing should be those who are connected with their friends and relative or who are integrated in their respective communities or social group. For viral marketing to prove effective the messages must be viral, in other words individuals who receive the messages must be willing to open and forward them. In this sense, individuals with the best connections, those maintaining the closest links with their group, are ideally placed to receive this kind of message as they are the most willing to subsequently forward it. As firms seek to reach the widest possible number of people, the target public in viral campaigns should be those who are well connected with their environment or who are more integrated in communities or social groups. In the current scenario it is necessary that marketers have to be more creative of the message to arouse recipient curiosity. It is danger if undifferentiated messages are sent as it may bring annoyance to consumers and it may put the viral dynamism to halt, or even worse it can lead to a negative opinion which may harms the brand image.

Limitations and further research

The present research has some limitation as convenience sample are used which to some extent restricts the generalisation of the finding and it is advisable to combine the model with other samples of other segments of the population. Beside this, study is conducted using survey as a source of information and in furtherance of this it is proposed to conduct experimental study to provide a clear picture about the process which an individual follow in specific situation of receiving and forwarding viral messages.