

VIRAL MARKETING MESSAGES: CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARDS FASHION APPAREL

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Abstract: Due to the rapid growth of Internet usage, business sectors can gain much more benefit from it by using the Internet as a marketing tool or an advertising platform. The Internet can help a marketer, or a company promote to a large number of audiences at a lower cost. One of the effective ways to reach a large number of audiences from the Internet is by conducting viral marketing. Hence, it is essential to understand how the quality of viral marketing messages can affect customers' purchase intentions. This study will employ the Smart-PLS 3.0 to examine to test the relationship between the factors on consumer purchase intention. Questionnaires were distributed to get responses in this study which comprised 87% of the response rate. In a nutshell, three out of four direct relationships were showing a significant positive correlation with purchase intention, namely informativeness, credibility and consumer involvement. This result indicates that entertainment has no significant relationship with the purchase intentions of consumers. Despite the useful findings that have been gathered from this study, there are some limitations found in this study. In the discussion, a summary of this study, managerial implications and new research direction are presented.

Keywords: credibility, informativeness, fashion, purchase intentions, viral marketing

Introduction

Viral marketing is a technique that relies on social networks marketing and the exponential spread of marketing messages, which an individual will further share the marketing message to a new audience that creates attention and brand awareness (Barth et al., 2016). This method of marketing uses social media, text messaging, videos and other person-to-person methods to spread information about an article, product or service. The viral marketing content usually has a well-designed strategy behind it, but preparation and creativity are vital as well. Viral marketing spreads messages quickly like a virus, which helps to generates consumers' interest and potential sale of a brand or product.

Social media has unlocked the opportunity for retailers in many nations (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). Individuals can gain advantages from the user-friendliness of social media websites and applications to communicate, socialise and expressing out judgements. At the same time, businesses took the opportunity from social media to do marketing and advertising (Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2017). In a recent survey, Malaysia's Internet usage had risen to 85.7% from 70.0% from 2015 to 2017 (New Strait Times, 2018). Gupta (2018) highlights viral marketing strategy contributes to being a potent and influential tool for branding and awareness, which also to generate more leads. This is because influencers endorse the company to their family, friends and close acquaintances, which adds points to the credibility of an advertisement. The importance of the study is to identify to what extent of the purchasing intentions of consumers makes from the quality of viral marketing messages on apparel products.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Consumers' Purchase Intentions

Customers purchase intention towards the development of viral marketing strategies are barely considered as an issue of importance by marketers; neither are they regarded as an essential matter of survival for a company or brand. Based on Wang and Lan (2018), purchasing intention is the willingness of consumers to but a particular product or service. Alhidari and Almeshal (2017) defined that purchase intention is the consumer's pending transaction. As a result, consumer buying behaviour is determining from the quality of viral marketing messages, which hugely affects their purchasing decision of fashion apparel.

Cham, Ng, Lim and Cheng (2017) established that the consumer purchase intentions in apparel products were believed to be affected by the word-of-mouth, brand image, self-concept, perceived quality and need for uniqueness. It is reported that Generation Y consumers may be a profitable market for apparel retailers, especially for branded names. Still, their buying intention and interest for clothing are inadequate During the process when a consumer is engaging with a given product, the knowledge a consumer has will affect their search behaviour, and thus affecting their purchase intentions.

Correspondingly, Kumar and Kanchan (2017) argued that the cultural values have control on the purchase intention of fashion apparel. Marketers need to associate with the social benefits to encourage the purchase intentions of consumers to a particular product or service. However, Jovanovic et al. (2017) established that rational appeal in advertising have a stronger influence on the purchase intentions of male members while emotional appeal has a stronger impact on the purchase intention of female members. As a result, consumer buying behaviour is determined from the quality of viral marketing messages, which hugely affects their purchasing decision of apparel products.

Entertainment

Entertainment can be defined as the level of enjoyment associated with a message. According to Teixeira, Picard and Kaliouby (2013), the amount of entertainment in an ad contains warm, entertaining and playful materials which will make the advertisement pleasant to watch. Motwani and Haryani (2018) point out that entertainment is an essential element that can

determine an advertisement's efficiency to be exciting and pleasing to have a positive impact on consumers' attitude.

Besides, Rukuni et al. (2017) state that entertainment can be considered to the level of enjoyment provided by stimuli such as humor and fun characteristics in an advertisement. This indicates that humorous messages will lead to good circulation. In Eisend (2011) findings, humor does not trigger effect but works as an attention-grabbing feature that will decrease negative perceptions. Viewers need enjoyable content to share and forward the message with others. This indicates that the level of entertainment in message content has direct influence on the consumers' perceptions and behaviours as well.

Entertaining messages that are added in the viral marketing strategy will encourage people to further sharing of the message. Karimiyazdi and Mokhber (2015) state that the value of entertainment has a very significant role in persuading individuals to forward viral messages. Consumers prefer viral messages that can provide the entertainment (Rukuni et al., 2017). Lou and Yuan (2018) highlight that advertisement that are entertaining captures positive cognitive and affective values. In viral marketing, the main goal is to make a splash in the market to showcase a specific brand and its unique characteristics. Based on Najib, Kasuma and Bibi (2016) findings, entertaining advertising will put the audience in a favourable mood, which generates a positive impact on consumers' attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand itself. The entertainment value influence individuals to forward their behaviour in viral marketing campaigns (Karimiyazdi & Mokhber, 2015). Based on this study, the value of entertainment plays a significant role to influence individuals to make their purchasing decisions.

H1: There is a positive relationship between entertainment viral marketing messages and consumers' purchase intentions

Informativeness

Informativeness refers to the amount of information contained in a message. Cho, Huh and Faber (2014) defined informativeness as the extent on how consumers perceive an advertisement that provides relevant and useful information for them. Rukuni et al. (2017) state that consumers require information that is relevant, up-to-date and useful to satisfy their needs. Hence, making informative messages a crucial construct of the study. Irritating information includes messages that are annoying, insulting, overly manipulating and offending the consumers (Trivedi, 2017). Based on Motwani and Haryani (2018), contents in viral marketing messages must be concise and clearly understood to capture the attention of consumers.

Based on previous research, informative messages in an advertisement is vital in determining its effects. Zernigah and Sohail (2012) state that an informative ad makes consumers aware of the latest products and also informing how the product is better than other competitors had to offer. Informativeness of messages yield benefits towards the retailers as it creates a positive behavioural intention. It is a valuable incentive to influence consumers' purchase intentions by informing them what they ought to know.

Rukuni et al. (2017), informative messages sent to customers have to be useful. Informative message content can give a clear idea towards the advertisement and positive behavioural

intentions. Zernigah and Sohail (2012) state that informative messages are the most significant factors affecting consumers' attitudes which are followed by entertainment and source credibility in viral marketing. Information provided relating to apparels and textiles will affect a consumer make purchases. Sanad (2016) established that information availability and virtual experience are mainly changing consumer attitudes towards internet apparel shopping and may encourage a consumer to make a purchase. Hence, consumers purchase intention are profoundly affected if they have a strong tendency to believe the information provided by the opinion leaders and market mavens. This illustrates that informative in viral marketing messages will affect consumers' purchase intentions.

H2: There is a positive relationship between informative viral marketing messages and consumers' purchase intentions

Credibility

The credibility of a message is an essential factor in making an advertisement viral. As identified in previous research by Esmailpour and Aram (2016), a credible message has two important factors, which are reliability and expertise. This strategy utilises honesty, trust, believability and expertise in order for consumers to adopt the position in the message as their own. Many people avoid advertisements on social networks because of the lack of credibility or trust (Wang and Lan, 2018). Rukuni et al. (2017) stressed that source credibility refers to the level of respect in particular which is given to the message originator. This highlights that consumers will not internalise a message they do not believe to be true or from a non-credible source.

Advertising credibility can be described as consumers' perception of the believability and truthfulness of an advertisement. Esmailpour and Aram (2016) findings, the source of the message credibility profoundly affects the consumers' attitude such as brand honesty, brand interest and purchase intention. To be successful in viral marketing, a company should properly design their ad messages that will make its consumers feel the source of the message is highly credible. People tend to be more trustworthy towards a brand online advertisement if they recognised or familiar with it. Also, Zernigah and Sohail (2012) state that when source credibility is in high trustworthiness, this creates a positive impact among viewers and their attitudes towards the brand. Credibility in messages affects the perceived quality towards a source, which may or may not result in associated with trusting behaviours among the consumers.

However, not all advertisement on the Internet is credible. Based on previous studies, social media users need to pay attention to information credibility because online rumour would cause harm to society and individuals (Li & Suh, 2015). Najib et al. (2016) state that the message on the Internet perceived to be less credible by consumers unless a well-known brand communicates it. It shows consumer credibility are strongly influenced by the message provided by both established and non-established brand. Hence, these previous finding shows how the credibility of viral marketing messages can affect a consumer purchase intention in the market.

H3: There is a positive relationship between credible of viral marketing messages and consumers' purchase intentions

Consumer Involvement

Another aspect concerning the match of content and product presented in a viral marketing campaign is the amount of involvement of a consumer. Consumer involvement threatens how an advertisement is virally shared. Rawat and Mann (2016) claimed that consumer involvement could be defined as the internal state of mind which consumer experience when making a product purchase. Furthermore, Barth et al. (2016) emphasises that the level of consumer involvement with a product depends on the significance a product has for a person and whether the product can satisfy their personal goals and expectations. The consumer who is involving themselves in experiencing a product or service in terms of value tends to have a high emotional or affective involvement with the product or service.

Correspondingly, Chao and Chen (2016) consumers that have a high level of product involvement have a strong motivation to seek, compare and process any relevant information of a product before their purchase. Consumers, who often consider themselves to be overwhelmed by irrelevant advertisements, gradually rely on advice from others in professional and personal networks when making purchase decisions. Thus it initiates the consumer's involvement in search of information to satisfy their needs. These researchers revealed that consumer involvement is a critical factor in consumer's purchasing process.

Besides that, Hossain and Rahman (2014) examined that various brand-related variables such as brand attitude, brand status, self-concept, willingness to pay a premium and reference groups using fashion apparel brands as the principal objective to show their effect towards consumer involvement in fashion apparel. Also, Kumar and Kanchan (2017) construct that consumers get involved in showing their fashion and lifestyle to express their personality artistically. Therefore, the findings above identify how consumer involvement in interpreting advertisement messages have an impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

H4: There is a positive relationship between consumer involvement in the viral marketing messages and consumers' purchase intentions

Methodology

The population of this research will consist of all internet users, but it is impossible to survey every individual in the market. Based on Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission (2017), the majority of internet users are people between 17 and 34 years old. Hence, university students would be a good sample as the majority of them are in this age range. The population frame for this study is among Multimedia University (MMU) Melaka students. This research uses convenience sampling due to time constraint, and in the empirical research, it helps to conclude about a particular population.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic Profiling

Table 1 shows the gender of respondents who answered the survey. Female respondents have the highest frequency with 103 respondents which is equivalent to 59.2% of the total respondents. Meanwhile, the total number of male respondents is 71, with the percentage of 40.8% of the total respondents. The results may be due to the random distributing of

questionnaires within the Multimedia University Melaka campus. The table shows that the female population is higher than the male population in the university.

Based on the race of respondents, Chinese respondents have the highest frequency of 90 respondents which is equivalent to 51.7%. Malay respondents are the second highest which consist of 65 respondents, equal to 37.4%. There are only 10 Indian respondents that are equivalent to 10.3%. On the other hand, Table 3 shows that there is only one respondent from another race, which is from Saudi Arabia, that accounted for 0.6% of the total number of respondents.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage analysis of respondents

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	71	40.8
Female	103	59.2
Race		
Malay	65	37.4
Chinese	90	51.7
Indian	18	10.3
Others	1	0.6
Age of respondents		
Below 18 years	3	1.7
18 to 24 years	156	89.7
25 to 30 years	14	8.0
31 to 35 years	1	0.6
Level of education		
High School	4	2.3
Foundation	29	16.7
Diploma	25	14.4
Degree	115	66.1
Postgraduate	1	0.6
Job-status		
Student	174	100.00
Government Servant	0	0
Private Sector Employee	0	0
Self-employed	0	0
Others	0	0

Measurement Model Results

The construct validity and reliability is used to assess the goodness of the measurement model in this study. Reliability is a consistency test of the measurement models measures over a repetitive measurement. At the same time, validity concerns how well a measurement model capable of measuring the particular theory or concept (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). Convergent and discriminant validity determines the construct validity in this study. Convergent validity refers to the degree of which multiple construct indicators which are theoretically related are in agreement. Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE)

were used to assess the convergence validity (Hair et al. 2019). As shown in Table 2, the loadings of all construct indicators, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability and AVE from this study meet the threshold value as mentioned by Hair et al. (2019).

This study follows the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) procedure prescribed by Henseler et al. (2015) to assess discriminant validity. As depicted in Table 3, all values of HTMT were lower than the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), thus providing evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 2: Measurement items of the study

Variables	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Credibility	C1	0.853	0.75	0.767	0.856	0.665
	C2	0.76				
	C3	0.83				
Consumer Involvement	CI1	0.737	0.764	0.77	0.850	0.586
	CI2	0.79				
	CI3	0.729				
	CI4	0.802				
Entertainment	E1	0.834	0.901	0.904	0.927	0.717
	E2	0.867				
	E3	0.874				
	E4	0.831				
	E5	0.824				
Informativeness	I1	0.779	0.813	0.826	0.869	0.572
	I2	0.808				
	I3	0.815				
	I4	0.693				
	I5	0.676				
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.802	0.751	0.755	0.858	0.668
	PI2	0.798				
	PI3	0.85				

Table3: Discriminant Validity

	Credibility	Customer Involvement	Entertainment	Informativeness	Purchase Intention
Credibility					
Customer Involvement	0.618				
Entertainment	0.462	0.410			
Informativeness	0.554	0.520	0.612		
Purchase Intention	0.569	0.573	0.361	0.556	

Structural Model Results

After computing the path estimates in the structural model by bootstrap analysis, the statistical significance of the path coefficients was determined. According to Hair et al. (2019), although 5000 resamples are recommended, the authors also stated that the number of bootstrap samples should be high. They exceeded the number of valid observations in the data.

Table 4 shows the direct relationships of the independent to the dependent variable. Three out of four direct relationships were showing a significant positive relationship with purchase intention, namely informativeness ($\beta = 0.251$, $p < 0.01$), credibility ($\beta = 0.208$, $p < 0.01$) and consumer involvement ($\beta = 0.232$, $p < 0.01$). This leads us to support H2, H3 and H4. On the other hand, the result reveals that the entertainment to purchase intention is non-significant ($\beta = 0.010$).

There is a significant relationship between the informativeness of viral marketing messages and consumers' purchase intentions. The results are by Trivedi (2017), where the research indicates that informative messages in viral marketing profoundly influence the consumer buying behavioural intention when the content is useful and relevant to the receiver. Similarly, buying intentions of a user is highly associated with the message clarity of viral marketing (Motwani and Haryani, 2018).

Besides, the findings from this study also show that the credibility of viral marketing messages influences consumers' purchase intentions. Consumers also tend to believe more on words that came from a trusted source is more credible such as reputable fan page, popular website or social media and even close family and friends (Wang and Lan, 2018). In other words, the hypothesis may be accepted because consumers tend to believe viral messages from a trusted source and not from any unknown platforms. Based on Motwani and Haryani (2018), the hypothesis is supported. Still, customers are more likely to respond to viral ads if it is sent from companies that they know or familiar.

Likewise, the results showed that there is a significant relationship between consumer involvement and consumers' purchase intention. This finding is consistent with Wang and Lan (2018) and Esmaeilpour and Aram (2016). Wang and Lan (2018) concurred that that consumer attitudes (beliefs and behavioural intentions) influence viral advertising. In other words, the attitude of customers is the customers' association or evaluation towards objects. In the research, it clearly states that consumer purchase decision depends highly on the positive attitude of customers that make them involved with the viral advertisement. Esmaeilpour and Aram (2016) agree that when consumer involvement is high, they will put more attention and effort to source out the message. Hence, the involvement level of consumers reflects their interest in the received viral marketing messages.

The lack of significant effects for entertainment on consumer involvement is consistent with existing literature (Lou and Yuan, 2018). Their findings show that entertainment value has no significant influence over consumers' trust over branded content. Relatively, this means consumers are not profoundly affected by the entertaining characteristics of an ad, and consumers seem to be unsure of taking further actions such as making purchasing decisions. Correspondingly, Motwani and Haryani (2018) study show the rejection of entertainment value

in viral marketing with the buying intention of a user, and it may cause by the changed with a prevailing dynamic environment.

Table 4: Hypothesis Results

Hypotheses	Path	Std Beta	Std Error	t-value	Remarks
H1	Entertainment -> Purchase Intention	0.010	0.072	0.135	Not supported
H2	Informativeness -> Purchase Intention	0.251	0.071	3.538	Supported
H3	Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.208	0.08	2.614	Supported
H4	Customer Involvement -> Purchase Intention	0.232	0.082	2.851	Supported

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this research project is to identify to what extent do the purchase intentions of consumers make from the quality of viral marketing messages on apparel products. Marketers can take the opportunity to use viral marketing strategy to share content at a lower advertising cost. Although particular social media requires some cost of advertising, as it begins to get picked up by the viewers, these viewers will help share the content and thus, lowering the advertising expense. As a marketer, it is crucial to know how to spread information to a large audience at low costs. Besides that, it also helps the business to increase their credibility. When a brand goes viral, it grabs the attention of the news audience, which attracts more people to give a product or service a chance. Compared to a traditional marketing campaign, a viral marketing strategy helps a business to build faster growth. This strategy has the potential to create explosive growth in a short period that reaches a significant number of audience. Despite the useful findings that have been gathered from the analysed information, there are some limitations found in this study.

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