Consumers’ Attitude towards Viral Marketing in Pakistan

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Abstract

Owing to the overwhelming rise of technology, effective and efficient market site for marketers to advance their products has been realized. Popular among latest trends is the realization of popularity or viral marketing used by many in the world that marketers ought to identify themselves with especially with consumers’ appreciation for it is widely acknowledged today the world is a global village. This research entails the Pakistanis marketing advertising and its reception by the market in the country. With a population of more than 150,000,000 people, the country offers a perfect benchmark for our study owing to its vast market and its balanced demographic distribution. Mode of data collection was by a combination of both questionnaire and sampling method. This mode of data collection was ideal because we did want to target both the learned persons and those who are not, the old and the young and also those who live in posh and shanty towns in Pakistan. Four hundred twenty respondents participated in this exercise with most of our respondents being those who reside in urban areas with a well-balanced approach based on age, location, wealth status, and region. From our findings, there exists a feel-good inclination towards independent variables anchored on entertainment, credibility, and informativeness which is the glue that holds product promotion to the level where the populace make an informed decision when the three factors mentioned above are addressed.

On the other hand, dependent variable leans towards popularity in marketing with crucial ingredient being the availability of information and its accessibility coupled with a critical ingredient referred to as authenticity of credibility being an epitome to the whole process of viral marketing. However, it is essential that we admit that the older class were skeptical owing to the whole issue of viral marketing being online because it may be a dangerous exposure to the
youths with regards to the internet. That being the case, important lesson derived was that marketing strategists should design their viral marketing that contains adequate informatics, authentic and authoritative to customer needs and above all sensitive. If this can be addressed, then it is a guarantee that there rating will increase and more Pakistani citizens will subscribe to viral marketing.

Introduction

As a result of rapid growth of mobile phones and the internet technology over the entire across the continental spheres of the earth and their fast absorption by the populace world over, companies and business organizations have been quick so as not to be left behind by this significant wave of development (Pelau&Zegreanu,2010). With this, business organizations and companies have seen a window of opportunity; they view it as a free and a game-changing means with which they can effectively apply the new modern way of advertising and branding owing to the flow of technological advancement (Haghrian et al.,2005). Upon doing this, expectations grow owing to the accessibility of the broad market that lies in their hands. One undisputed fact is that more persons are likely to receive this new mode of advertising primarily because it is being carried out over the internet and there is no doubt that mobile phone and internet sales are a boom at the present moment in time thus the availability of a broader market as opposed to the conservative approach such as personal selling which is slow and cumbersome especially to the fast-moving world of today coupled with advancement of technology and literacy skills. As such businesses and companies have had a gold-rush-like a moment with hunger and zeal of tapping the newly-realized paradise of advert thanks to the technology. Most notable of these modern forms of advertising is viral marketing. Its usage as a tool of advertising has made it earn itself the recognition as the most important market trend in
communication and its auxiliary services. Viral as a ‘type of marketing that infects customers with the advertising message which is like a communicable disease that will affect one after the other like a rampant flu virus.’ This statement on the definition of viral marketing was fronted by Palka (2009P.172). For viral marketing to effectively and efficiently operate, information must be fed to a social network site notably Facebook or Twitter making it a prime objective to product awareness by the populace. The fact that over half the world population can access the internet or do have access to mobile phones is an incentive for viral market operators all over the world. Having done that, an individual has the capability of making an informed decision on the product to buy given the fact that he or she can freely consult with his or her friend who at times may be very far away (Cruz&Fill,2008). If the product gets approval from many persons, then it is a guaranteed jackpot. The more a product has received favorable ratings and recommendations, the more people are likely to purchase that particular product. Feedback information has also been addressed where one may seek additional information regarding the product and easily obtain it. This is done through say blogs, Skype and message pop-ups.

Nearly over half the world population have social network accounts with hundreds joining every day and more and more social media platform arising. Additionally, much time is spent on this sites with a sizeable number of at least 52 percent of world’s population being online within a single period thus sharing with friend’s information through the social sites (Facebook statistics,2011). This information can be translated to Pakistan, the second largest mobile phone user in the Middle East and lower Asia with nearly 62 percent having access to mobile phones (World Bank,2011).

For the product promotion of this kind to effectively take root, the message transmitted should be authentic and easily traceable to its source of origin (Cruz &Fill,2008). A platform where the
CONSUMERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING IN PAKISTAN

consumer can easily refer to as opposed to the unreliable platform which tends if not do discourage more consumers thus lowering sales. Inculcating with it aspects such as captivating language, and having realistic target groups and knowing what they do like and most appropriate times they can be accessed is critical. Language applied should be sensitive as to the needs of the targeted group and not generalizing the information transmitted.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Viral Marketing

Their merits of viral marketing are countless. However, I shall address the relevance of sequentially. Its transmission is high-speed thus able to reach a sizeable number of persons within a twinkle of an eye (Eckler&Bolls,2011). The message transmitted via viral marketing is mostly personalized thus able to address an individual as a specific entity and not generalize (Woerndel et al.,2008). This along with proper response as to the needs of a consumer are important. The determination of information via it is also very cheap and to top it up it covers a large number of persons’ world over, and it lacks geographical boundaries to curtail it thus it is world information.

As usual, there exist two sides of a coin. It also has its demerits, for example, many online users view it as a destructive agent since it mostly pops-up when one is browsing (Woerndel et al.,2008). Similarly there exist no measures to curtail the excesses it comes with. Owing to this loophole, moral decaying adverts are all over the internet for example online prostitution when this negative information spreads about viral marketing, there is bound to be a negative impact regarding sales resulting in spreading of negative information.
As such, the ball is in the court of the viral marketers. It is up to them to know what makes the consumer happy and at the same time what frowns him or her. As such, it can be observed that there exist a need for them to be sensitive to the plight of those persons whom they send adverts to. Failure to this, consumers may in the long run breed resentment which will brew with older generation complaining of moral decay, young people complaining of nuisance and in the long run, they do end up losing the market.

Consumers’ attitude towards viral marketing

In order to gauge the effectiveness of the advertisement put forth, one has to apply the aspect of informative (Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011). This tool is of very great essence as it is it that can adequately be used to enable a client to make an informed decision regarding a particular item he or she may want to purchase. Information is key to the buyer as lack of it is characterized by low sales because it is only through it that buyers can know that a particular product exists, that this set of a product is better when it comes to quality than the other one and even where that particular product can be found (Tsang et al., 2004). In order to really address key concern, the quality of information shared should be that that entail salient features such as the form of timelessness that is it should go with the current timings, accuracy in the sense that it should be reliable and should be a meter used to gauge information regarding the product in the market (Muzaffar&Kamran, 2011).

Customers will be more receptive to that platform that spreads quality and accurate information thus much emphases ought to be put on the information given out since poor quality information
makes consumers develop a dislike on the information conveyed (Blanco et al. 2010). Addressing customer preferences is also critical as it generates positive attitudes thus creating enthusiasm and want to hear more and more about the product. Similarly, persons carrying out adverts should be able to relate the information to local consumer settings based on culture, age, timing and preference of the market and the target audience targeted. Failure to do this renders the information conveyed ineffectively. Much effort also ought to be put on the target audience of the product. Many at times, business organizations have advertised products and in those periods failed to get a grasp of their target audience, as such, the information ends up getting disoriented hence reduction in the level of sales.

Entertainment and consumer attitude towards viral marketing

For an advertisement to be an attraction to many consumers, it must contain an element of entertainment in it (Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011). Entertainment is key to effective and highly captivating adverts that will, in the long run, translate to increased sales. Surprisingly without the aspect of entertainment, the mobile advertisement will not hit a notch higher. It is it, entertainment that glues the eyes of people to that particular product being advertised. As such, viral marketers should ensure that the attention of the consumer is drawn to the product being advertised (Tsang et al. 2004). Entertainment brings come-along factor making the consumer more loyal to the brand thus leading to increased sales as opposed to when a particular advert lacks an element of entertainment as a result of the amusement created through entertainment.

Additionally, when a particular advert keeps on playing either on television or radio stations on and on, it tends to create a long lasting impression on the mind of the buyer concerning that said product. As a result, the buyer out of curiosity may end up buying the said product through
impulse buying or even buying in excess than what is required at that present moment. This leads to increased sales on the part of the viral marketer.

Irritation and consumer attitude towards viral marketing

Given that there exist positive, feel-good adverts buoyed by the fact that they do increase sales capacity, viral marketers should be careful not to exceed the optimum level that may render their advert an irritation. The consumer can easily spot the act of manipulation on the advertised content thus ending up annoying the recipients of the message being passed (Palka et al., 2009). This annoying trait may be spotted for example when a particular advert demeans a particular race, community, religion or even sect as such; the targeted group will not be purchasing those particular products as they will view it to be looking down upon them. Also in the event with more wordings put in an advertisement program, it does end up being a nuisance as people are not entirely able to grasp what is being delivered. As such, too much additional information in the advertisement is a total waste of time and does not offer any value. Instead, it ends up being a source of irritation to consumers thus the low sales witnessed. Most mobile advertisements tend to very confusing and a great source of distraction to the consumer due to lack as they send their adverts time and again thus becoming a nuisance.

Similarly, adverts transmitted via email have got three irritations to the buyer in that it appears to intrude on the privacy of the consumer (Morimoto & Chang, 2006). The worst thing is that they send several messages giving the consumer an option to opt out of their services. The second thing is the loss of personal information.

Source credibility and consumers’ attitude towards viral marketing
The primary concern of viral marketers is primarily anchored on credibility. Credibility is core to the effective advertisement is it is the key that glue consumers to appreciate products advertised. One fundamental fact is that the stronger and credible the advert is, the higher the number of the consumer are likely to subscribe to it thus translating to profit from sales (Haghriam et al., 2005). This is because, with credibility, market value is likely to be higher especially when the information comes from a trusted and reliable source (Muzaffr & Kamran, 2011). However, one crucial aspect to consider lies with the fact that the higher the level of trust put in a viral message platform, then the same will replicate on the risk associated with it which is inherently low due to the level of honesty and diligence — similar grounds. Over the recent past, abuse by viral marketers such as abuse by use of email where consumers are bombarded by spams thus lowering product uptake in the market due to an inadequate response from the consumer.

Consumers do have a great concern especially with regards to manipulation of data from viral marketers. It should be noted that the claimant attitude is gauged on the response towards marketing messages (Bauer et al., 2005). Thus for the sole purpose of evaluating consumer attitude taking into effect informativeness, entertainment, source credibility, and irritation. If the message is relevant, it will have a positive effect having inculcated the aspect of entertainment, informativeness, and entertainment. One key factor regarding consumer attitude pertaining a particular product is referred to as source credibility. It entails a potential consumer inquiring about a particular product or even being informed about the effectiveness of a particular product. He or she is likely to purchase such a product owing to the existence of strong trust between family members.
This research work takes four independent variables into consideration including source credibility, informativeness, irritation, and entertainment. It also examines their impact on consumer attitude towards viral marketing which represents the dependent variable influenced by the need to assess consumer attitude concerning viral marketing.

Methodology

The research examined customer attitude on viral marketing, and it was recognized as the dependent variable while message informativeness, credibility of the source, entertainment, and irritation were acknowledged as the independent variables. Questionnaires were dispersed to the prospective respondents representing the means of data collection for the research purpose.

The internet was utilized to aid in the launch of the survey questionnaire while other questionnaires were overseen through personalized delivery. The entire data collection activity lasted for one month where the research adopted the convenience sampling technique to amass the crucial data. Individuals who frequently use e-mails, mobile phones, blogs, and social sites represent the targeted group for the data collection. These respondents commonly found in multinational companies as employees, the consumers in the general market and universities as graduates and undergraduates interact with the mediums critical to the study.

The research utilized a five-point Likert scale questionnaire as the main instrument for the collection of data. The questionnaire comprised of a range from five down to one with the former representing a strongly agree response while the latter represents a strongly disagree stance. The remaining three ranges represent the agree, undecided and disagree choices for the respondents respectively. The significance of this questionnaire structure is that it helps to evaluate the attitude of the respondents towards viral marketing and all its scopes. Data analysis and findings
Normality statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Skewness Statistics</th>
<th>Kurtosis Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informativeness</td>
<td>-0.193</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
<td>-5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritation</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>-4.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Credibility</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>-2.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards viral marketing</td>
<td>-0.252</td>
<td>-4.347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the table above the average score from respondent on general attitude concerning viral marketing established as 3.139 on the Likert scale, with 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. This score is above three which is the neutral score, which means that the general attitude concerning viral marketing from the respondents is affirmative.

Correlation analysis

Informativeness, source credibility, and entertainment are considered as being related to attitude towards viral marketing and is perceived as positive. The value 0.483 represents the correlation of attitude concerning informativeness and viral marketing but it is an estimated value, and the implication value is 0.000. It illustrates the variables are positively related and are firmly bound to each other. The relationship indicates that informativeness of viral marketing communications does not affect the attitude of consumers regarding viral marketing. The correlation value of consumer attitude towards entertainment and viral marketing is 0.377, and 0.000 represents the implication value. It shows that a weak positive relationship exists between the two variables. The two variables affect each other however to a minor degree as depicted from by the relationship between the two. This displays the two variables with a non-substantial and fragile positive relationship hence the variables do not affect each other. The delicate positive relationship depicts that irritation does not affect the attitude of a consumer towards viral marketing.
The credibility of a particular source can influence a more favorable consumer attitude towards marketing communications. Results from the study prove that the relationship between the two variables is modest and substantial which confirms that both variables affect each other.

Descriptive statistics

The table above represents the variables, where the Cronbach alpha value is beyond the suitable value, illustrating that data from the examination is dependable. The normality of data was computed using the skewness and kurtosis where the values of both for each variable ranges between the suitable value +1 and -1 therefore, it depicts that the data has a normal distribution.

Discussion and conclusions

The research purpose was to investigate consumer attitude towards viral marketing and study the scopes that hold the potential to influence consumer attitudes. The study developed four hypotheses to examine the relation between viral marketing and viral message credibility, apparent informativeness, irritation, and entertainment. Hypotheses one is acceptable based on the research findings and illustrates that apparent informativeness of viral marketing communications creates positive consumer attitudes. Indications of a positive and robust relationship between the variables prove the integrity of the first hypotheses of the study — the results of preceding studies back these research results by Tsang et al. (2004), Haghirian et al.
CONSUMERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING IN PAKISTAN

(2005), Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini (2011) and Muzaffar and Kamran (2011). It is imperative from all these researches that informativeness represents an essential forecaster of the value and is significantly involved in the determination of consumer attitude in regards to viral marketing.

The study outcomes show a slight positive relationship between entertainment and viral marketing which confirms the second hypothesis. It illustrates that consumer attitude in regards to viral marketing is not affected by entertainment contents of viral marketing communications. The study also shows that entertainment is capable of generating positive reactions to viral marketing. These results match with the results of Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini (2011) because entertainment enhances the value for customers and increases their loyalty consequently and influences an affirmative attitude on viral marketing.

Consumer attitude concerning viral marketing is not influenced by irritation as indicated by a non-significant value for the variable showing that it has no impact on attitude concerning viral marketing in contrast to other variables (Haghirian et al. 2005). Findings from the study demonstrate that consumers are unlikely to get irritated as a result of viral marketing communications. The study also shows that irritation does not lead to a negative consumer attitude. Therefore the third hypothesis is rejected. However previous studies have stated that consumer attitude towards viral marketing worsens as a result of the upsurge in the number of advertisements (Palka et al. 2009). Excessive manipulation of viral marketing communications creates a negative consumer attitude. Results from the study showed that consumers are not irritated or aggravated by viral marketing communications.

The study results show that the credibility of the source of a viral marketing message has a significant impact on the attitude of consumers concerning viral marketing. There is a positive relationship between the source credibility and attitude which ensures that the fourth hypothesis
is also accepted. Consumers are more inclined to have a positive attitude towards viral marketing where the credibility of the source is at its highest (Haghirian et al. 2005). Findings from the study suggest are consistent with past research and all the research results portray a positive consequence of honesty and integrity to the attitude of the consumer in regards to viral marketing (Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini 2011). The results show that consumers generally have a positive attitude regarding viral marketing. Among the various variables, informativeness stands out as the most substantial variable while source credibility comes second and third comes entertainment (Muzaffar and Kamran 2011). A positive attitude is nurtured through the provision of appropriate and suitable information to consumers. Equally, the credibility of the source is an essential factor where consumers receive and be sure of the messages received from sources deemed to be dependable. Consequently, an increase in the trustworthiness of the viral marketing communications creates a positive attitude. Correspondingly, the incorporation of entertainment increases the general consumer approval of viral marketing communications.

Mobile phones, social network sites, blogs, and e-mails represent diverse mediums that can assist marketing practitioners in Pakistan to design viral marketing campaigns to promote their brands. Marketers need to direct attention to the information conveyed on viral marketing communications because reliable, applicable, and valuable information provided to the customers increases the trustworthiness of viral marketing communications. Furthermore, entertainment should be considered as a vital element of viral marketing communications to make it fascinating for customers. The appropriate utilization of these mediums can significantly influence businesses growth in Pakistan. Viral marketing communication is two way in both the promoters and customers perspectives thus, nurturing long-term liaison with consumers without much cost.
The research also identifies several limitations including the time constraint and the small sample space used during the collection of data. A larger sample space is required to generate better results with higher chances of universalization. Secondly, the current study scrutinized a limited number of variables which represent an inconsistency in the generation of reliable results — the impact of inducements and the effect of marketing based on consent privacy issues among other independent variables should be included in the study. This inclusion could facilitate better investigation of consumer attitude concerning viral marketing. There is a need for additional research to help in confirming these conclusions and examine the topic thoroughly.

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CONSUMERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING IN PAKISTAN

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