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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERNET USERS PERCEPTION TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Viral marketing has emerged as an important concept in India as in other parts of the developing and developed countries and has become a necessary tool for every organization. Although there is increasing popularity among viral marketing, factors influencing to such a new communication medium, remains largely unknown. Hotmail has become one of the first to exploit online viral marketing since its email service was launched in the late 1990s, when every outgoing email contained a short message at the bottom with a link for people to click and sign up. In 1996, Steve and Tim also took advantage of viral marketing as a new phenomenon to promote the adoption of Hotmail, a free web-based e-mail service provider, and viral marketing launched this e-mail system from zero to 12 million subscribers in only 18 months at very little cost (Shukla, 2010). Viral marketing has attained a large growth in popularity in last few years. This paper attempt to study the perception of the internet users on viral marketing and the role of social media on the growth of viral marketing Business firm have risen to occasion and have started responding to environmental challenge by practicing viral marketing strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

“Viral” as the word itself means, spreads so widely and quickly, within a short span of time. It was implemented in marketing as a new promotional strategy for a product launch, to gain popularity among customers. Thus viral marketing incorporates a broad range of activities. The ultimate goal of marketers interested in creating successful viral marketing programs is to create viral messages that appeal to individuals with high social networking potential (SNP) and that have a high probability of being presented and spread by these individuals and their competitors in their communications with others in a short period of time. Among the first to write about viral marketing on the Internet was the media critic Doug Rushkoff. The assumption is that if such an advertisement reaches a “susceptible” user, that user becomes “infected” (i.e., accepts the idea) and shares the idea with others “infecting them,” in the viral analogy's terms. As long as each infected user shares the idea with more than one susceptible user on average (i.e., the basic reproductive rate is greater than one—the standard in epidemiology for qualifying something as an epidemic), the number of infected users grows according to an exponential curve. Of course, the marketing campaign may be successful even if the message spreads more slowly, if this user-to-user sharing is sustained by other forms of marketing communications, such as public relations or advertising.

Review of Literature

Jeffrey Rayport (1996), from Harvard Business School, is widely regarded in the literature as the inventor of both the concept of and the term “viral marketing” (Lam 2010). In the article “The Virus of Marketing”, published in December 1996, Rayport proposed the notion of considering a virus the “ultimate marketing program”. Rayport pointed out that a virus has some characteristics that are optimal for a marketing program: rapid speed of spreading, minimum costs and strong effect. (Rayport 1996). On the foundation laid by the work of Helm (2000), Bryce attempts to reach a broader and more appropriate definition for viral marketing in his book “Viral marketing: Potential and Pitfalls”. As a result, viral marketing is deemed the technological extension of word-of-mouth marketing or, in other similar terms, word of mouse and networked-enhanced word of mouth (Thevenot and Watier 2001). The general features of viral marketing are soon discovered from the case of Hotmail, the first service that practiced viral marketing and substantially grew its subscriber base (Subramani and Rajagopalan 2003; Leskovec *et al.*, 2007). Advertising messages are transmitted in viral marketing through person-to-person contact and communication, so that viral marketing has another name as word-of-mouth marketing, in which a user forwards a marketing message to others and refers to an interesting or satisfying product and/or service (Rayport and Jaworski, 2004). According to Bryce (2005), the success of Hotmail was attributed to three factors. First, each subscriber acted as Hotmail’s salesman by voluntarily delivering the advertising message embedded in every email

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sent. Second, the free mail service worked properly. Last and most importantly, the service was recommended by a known and trusted source because people usually sent emails to the people they know – their friends, colleges and acquaintances. (Bryce 2005). The intertwined relation between word of mouth and viral marketing makes it hard to separate them and is interesting enough to induce controversy among researchers over whether these two phenomena are the same or different (Kulp 2007). Viral marketing is a marketing technique that induces web sites or users to pass on a marketing message to other sites or users, creating a potentially exponential growth in the message’s exposure and influence (Cruz and Fill, 2008; Datta *et al.*, 2005). Laudon and Traver (2009) also describe viral marketing as the process of involving consumers to disseminate a company’s marketing information to their friends, family, and colleagues. Thorne (2008) further indicated that informative messages are usually electronically transmitted from person to person in viral marketing.

Objectives of the study

The aim of the research is to study about the effectiveness of viral marketing and suggest strategies to implement viral marketing and to get a clear insight of the following with respect to this study:

- To examine the awareness of viral marketing among the internet users
- To study about the internet users perception towards viral marketing
- To examine the role of various of social medias on viral marketing

Research Methodology

Research Design: The research design used in this study is descriptive and analytical in nature

Sampling Design: Convenience sampling technique

Sample Size: 150

Nature of respondents: Internet users

Data Collection: Primary data was collected through questionnaire survey

Secondary data was collected from journals and websites.

Analytical

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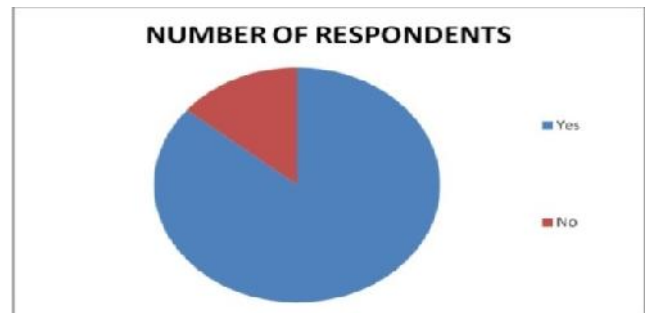
Table 1. Awareness about Viral Marketing

Response	No.of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	86	86%
No	14	14%
Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

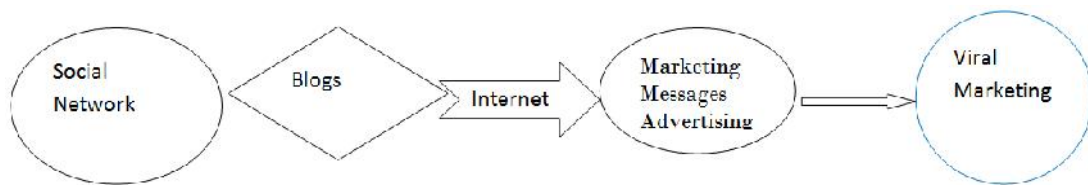
Awareness about viral marketing

From the above table it’s revealed that 86% of the respondents are aware of viral marketing and 14% of them are not aware of viral marketing.



Weighted average

The weighted average analysis was done to examine the perception of internet users towards viral marketing. It is evident from the table that out of 10 factors “Reliability” was ranked 1st by the respondents whose weighted average value is 30.33, and follow through is ranked last whose weighted average is 26.2



Source: Own Creation

Table 2. Perception of the Internet users towards the attributes of viral marketing

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Average	Rank
Reliability	62	32	5	1	0	30.33	1
Quality	32	60	6	2	0	28.13	5
Cost	22	62	14	2	0	26.93	8
Time	45	38	13	4	0	28.26	4
Response	41	50	6	3	0	28.60	3
Follow Thorough	23	50	24	3	0	26.2	10
Success	44	34	16	5	1	27.66	7
Performance	51	32	13	4	0	28.66	2
Assurance	35	36	21	7	1	26.46	9
Visibility	50	28	14	6	2	27.86	6

Chi-square

Table 3. The Association between the Age of the Internet users and usage of viral marketing

Level of significance	Degree of freedom %	Calculated value	Tabulated value
5%	16	10.63	21.026

Null hypothesis: The Age of the Internet users has no influence on usage of Viral Marketing

From the above chi-square analysis, it is found that the calculated value is 10.63 is lesser than the tabulated value 21.026. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected. So there is no association between the respondent's age and the and usage of viral marketing

Role of social media in viral marketing

Not a day goes by without having something new about, how millions of people are engaging in social media. Marketing concepts can be reached very cheaply when compared to traditional mass media marketing channels. Social media and viral marketing has now become a virtual social world where we meet our friends and family, engage in conversation about work –life experience including buying products and services and the resulting experience. The advent of social media has made a marketers life a lot more challenging. It has become much harder to capture and sustain consumer's attention and interest. To avoid this, marketers need to carefully monitor the early stages of a Viral marketing to take corrective measures. The low cost of social media marketing and the potential to reach and influence millions of people through personal recommendation seems to be a very lucrative option for marketers. However, if not managed properly, such campaigns also have the potential to get out of hand very quickly and become unmanageable. Marketers need to keep this mind and take a balanced approach.

Findings and suggestions

- The study shows that 86% of the respondents are aware of viral marketing.
- The study shows that 83% of the respondents felt face book as the effective social media to implement viral marketing.
- The product should be designed for social spread. The user should be able to invite other users, recommend the product, and share it with their network with ease.
- The study shows that respondents felt reliability as major factor for their satisfaction.
- Knowing who your customers are and where can you find them is important while considering the type of marketing channels. The research suggests that this is quite basic yet often overlooked aspect of the social media marketing.

Conclusion

The outcome of the study provides insights in to how internet is instrument for spread of viral marketing It also provides insights into the importance of overall business and marketing strategy while considering viral marketing as an option to market products. The research is relevant to marketers and organizations planning to use viral marketing concepts to market their digital products using social media.

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