

## Perception on Viral Marketing among Consumers

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**Abstract:** Viral marketing has given rise to the evolution of many electronic marketing strategies. The marketing practice that encourages the idea or perception of an individual to spread through internet has been defined as viral marketing. The objective of this paper is to investigate the perceptions of consumers on the components of viral marketing. The study analyses the perceptions of the one hundred select respondents on the five different components of viral marketing-E-mails, Videos, Blogs, Social networks and Forums. The study analyses how viral marketing helps raise the awareness among the consumers, its reach among the consumers and how it is used to share information on the features and prices of the products. Consumers attach different levels of trust to each of the five components of viral marketing. The study helps marketers and consumers to better understand and use the critical components of viral marketing to their advantage.

**Key words:** Viral Marketing • E-mails • Blogs • Social networks • Forums

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### INTRODUCTION

Viral Marketing refers to a marketing technique which spreads like a virus through the social network. The attractive part of viral marketing is that it is easier for people to pass it on to their peers effortlessly. Viral marketing could be said to be evolving into an accepted tool for penetrating the market and for creating the awareness among the consumers in the internet space on the products and services. Viral marketing gives the most effective and the fastest way of spreading products and services globally. Viral marketing, as a concept and practice, was popularized when the highly successful Hotmail started to append advertisements in its outgoing mails [1]. Today, viral marketing has become more popular due to three reasons. First, the entire web space has been dominated by social networks. Secondly, surfing the internet and specially the social networks has become unimaginably cheap on free of cost. Finally, internet has become an integral part of life of individuals, especially youngsters around the world. E-Mails, Videos, Blogs, Social Networking and Forums are the best channels for viral marketing.

E-mail marketing is the hottest and effective mode of marketing since this gives a perfect forum to keep the consumers informed of the latest developments and

upcoming trends. Blogs helps the consumers in order to promote and increase visibility of the site in search engines more often. When people forward E-mails with links to their friends or when they encourage their friends to visit specific links or websites on the internet, or when they share videos among themselves they could be presumed to be practicing viral marketing. YouTube may be considered to be the best example of internet viral marketing. To improve the attraction of the sites of network and to enhance their effectiveness as marketing tools, videos are embedded [2].

Social networking websites promote online business, which mostly attracts the consumers/buyers through viral marketing. Among them Facebook, Twitter and MySpace have been considered to be the excellent platforms for viral marketing campaigns. Forums are the powerful and best tools used the viral marketing. Social websites and forums connect people like no other website. Forums can be found on a wide variety of websites, not just ones designed for social networking. There are search free forums available only to promote the product marketed. Most forums let the consumer post links in either the body of their message or in their signature.

Hence, the person to surf the internet and social networks should be segmented into groups of different interest and needs before creating a successful campaign

for viral marketing. Modification and improvement should be carried to make the content of social network to be attractive to different segments of surfers.

**Viral Marketing-A Literary Revisit:** The following studies have been referred by the author for developing the research problem and the research design:

The article entitled, "Influence of Viral Marketing on Brand Equity Building With Reference to Online Social Networking Sites" by Dr. Ashutosh Nigam (2012), examined the parameters of viral marketing effecting media (e-discussion, websites, online chat, email etc) parameters that have effect over the brand equity of different products and services. The result of the study indicated that the viral marketing has a positive and significant relationship with brand equity dimensions. Positive word-of-mouth about brand helps in reducing distribution of free products to target consumers as networking sites give facilitating platform to build positive brand building perception [3].

Rebecca J. Larson, (2009), in his paper "The Rise of Viral Marketing through the New Media of Social Media: An Analysis and Implications for Consumer Behaviour" has established the rationality of the corporate presence in social media. The study found that there is no one approach common to all strategies of viral marketing and social media [4].

The thesis entitled, "Advertising amongst Ourselves: A Qualitative Study of Viewer Attitudes towards Viral Marketing", by Steven C. Kulp (2007), analysed the attitudes of consumers towards viral marketing. The study used to explore the motivation to share content, specifically, videos found on YouTube.com. The study also found that the several factors functioning as filters in the decision to forward content. Finally, the extent to which content was new was found to be a major factor [5].

The article entitled, "Viral Marketing: A New Branding Strategy to Influence Consumers" by Xiaofang Yang (2012), examined how rapid penetration of the internet and the predominance of various social media have influenced the consumers by facilitating the new technologies that provide new opportunities for the development of marketing techniques. The study suggested that viral marketing achieves better advertising effects when compared to traditional advertising. Professionals from the market focus group regarded integrated communication as the more effective marketing strategy [6].

In "The Dynamics of Viral Marketing" Jure Leskovec, Lada A. Adamic and Bernardo A. Huberman (2007) have explored variations in the behaviour of users within

their communities. The study found that marketers, hoping to develop normative strategies for word-of-mouth promotion, should ascertain the structure and interests of the customers of the social network [7].

**Motivation for the Study:** With the increasing modernized trends and technical advancement, the perception of consumers on viral marketing has been increasing day by day. Many consumers are still ignorant of the fact that they are in the clutches of the viral marketing techniques of many prudent marketers. Therefore, it is important to study the perception of consumers on viral marketing in India because many researchers have studied the viral marketing on various other dimensions and not on the level of consumer perception. Hence, there arises a need to analyze the level of individual perception of consumers on viral marketing and how the various factors like e-mail, videos, blogs, social networking's and forums will influence the perception of consumers. Therefore, in the present study an attempt has been made by the researcher under the title "Perception on Viral Marketing among Consumers."

**Focus of the Study:** The study has been carried out focusing on the following objectives.

**Primary Objective:** To study the perception of viral marketing among consumers.

**Secondary Objectives:**

- To compare the relationship between the various factors influencing the perception of viral marketing among consumers.
- To study the difference between the personal dimensions of consumers such as gender, domicile and the perception of the respondents on viral marketing.
- To understand the most important factor influencing the perception of consumers on viral marketing.

**Hypotheses Framed for the Study:** To test the perception of consumers on viral marketing, the following null and research hypotheses have been framed.

**Null Hypotheses:**

- The perception of the respondents on viral marketing does not significantly vary according to their gender.

- There is no significant difference in the perception of respondents on viral marketing according to their domicile.

#### Research Hypotheses:

- The perception of the respondents on viral marketing does significantly vary according to their gender.
- There is significant difference in the perception of the respondents on viral marketing according to their domicile.

**Scope of the Study:** The study covers the students who are pursuing the degree of Master of Business Administration offered by the colleges and institutes located in Tiruchirappalli. The study analyses the perception of viral marketing. The study has been conducted for a period of four months from December 2011 to March 2012.

**Research Design of the Study:** The research design based on the sound principles on:\

- A. Universe,
- B. Sampling,
- C. Data and
- D. Statistical tools has used for this study.

**Universe:** All the students who are pursuing the degree of Master of Business Administration offered by the colleges and institutes located in Tiruchirappalli city, numbering 983 in total, has been taken as the universe of the study.

**Selection of Samples:** From the universe, 100 students were selected as the sample through stratified random sampling.

**Data:** While the primary data of this study has been collected using an interview schedule, the secondary data were collected from books, journals, previous studies and World-Wide Websites.

**Statistical Tools Used:** The researcher has applied relevant statistical tools such as Percentage table, Karl Pearson Coefficient Correlation test, Student -‘T’ test and Factor Analysis to analyze the data collected.

**Limitations of the Study:** The Study Suffers the Following Limitations:

The study is confined to the period from December 2011 to March 2012. The data has been collected during the period of February 2012 to March 2012. Hence the result cannot be applied for any period other than the study period. The Findings, Suggestions and the conclusion may be applicable only to the students who are pursuing the degree of Master of Business Administration and not for other demographic groups.

**Analysis, Interpretation and Findings:** The analyses of the study, focused on measuring the level of perception of consumers on viral marketing, have been ascertained with help of the Statistical tools like percentage table, Karl Pearson Coefficient Correlation test, Student -‘T’ test and Factor Analysis.

**Findings:** The Table 1 explains the various dimensions of consumer perception on viral marketing. It could be inferred that, 51 per cent of the respondents have a low level of perception and 49 per cent of the respondents have a high level of perception on the general parameters. While 48per cent of the respondents have low level of perception with regard to E-mail, 52 per cent of the respondents have high level of perception. While measuring the perception of respondents on the videos, 50 per cent of the respondents have a low level of perception and the remaining 50 per cent have a high level of perception. On measuring the perception on Blogs, 58 per cent of the respondents have a low level of perception and 42 per cent of the respondents have al high level perception. While 41 per cent of the respondents are found to be having a low level of perception, 59 per cent of the respondents are having a high level of perception with regard to the Social networking Websites as the tool for viral marketing. Finally while measuring the perception of consumers on Forums, it is found that 47 per cent of the respondents have a low level of perception and 53 per cent of the respondents have a high level of perception.

**Findings:** The Table 2 depicts the inter correlation between the perception of respondents about the various components of viral marketing. It is understood that there is a positive correlation between the components but the results are not strong, because the values fall between 0.241 and 0.438. However the relationship between them is highly significant at 0.01 levels. Hence, it could be presumed that the level of perception among the respondents on the components of viral marketing is correlated.

Table 1: Various Dimensions of Consumer Perception on Viral Marketing

Sl. No	Perception	General Parameters	E-mails	Videos	Blogs	Social Networking Websites	Forums
1.	Low (in %)	51	48	50	58	41	47
2.	High (in %)	49	52	50	42	59	53

%-Percentage

Source: Field Data

Table 2: Inter Correlation Matrix Between the Perception of Respondents about the Various Components of Viral Marketing

	General	E-mails	Videos	Blogs	Social Networking Websites	Forums
General	1	0.419 (**)	0.430 (**)	0.241 (*)	0.438 (**)	0.294 (**)
E-mails	0.419 (**)	1	0.318 (**)	0.047	0.416 (**)	0.234 (*)
Videos	0.430 (**)	0.318 (**)	1	0.199 (*)	0.405 (**)	-0.037
Blogs	0.241 (*)	0.047	0.199 (*)	1	0.156	0.353 (**)
Social networking websites	0.438 (**)	0.416 (**)	0.405 (**)	0.156	1	0.122
Forums	0.294 (**)	0.234 (*)	-0.037	0.353 (**)	0.122	1
N	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: Field Data

Table 3: Student 'T' – Test for the Difference Between the Gender of the Respondents and Their Perception on the Various Components of Viral Marketing

Sl. No	Gender	Mean	S.D	Statistical Inference
1.	General			T=-.042 .966>0.05 Not Significant
	Male (n=62)	39.56	4.438	
	Female (n=38)	39.61	5.086	
2.	E-mails			T=-.847 .399>0.05 Not Significant
	Male (n=62)	21.52	3.775	
	Female (n=38)	22.11	2.587	
3.	Videos			T=.446 .657>0.05 Not Significant
	Male (n=62)	14.87	2.412	
	Female (n=38)	14.63	2.898	
4.	Blogs			T=1.842 .068<0.05 Not Significant
	Male (n=62)	9.73	2.234	
	Female (n=38)	8.84	2.477	
5.	Social Networking Websites			T=-.135 .893>0.05 Not Significant
	Male (n=62)	15.66	2.469	
	Female (n=38)	15.74	3.082	
6.	Forums			T=-.362 .718>0.05 Not Significant
	Male (n=62)	10.53	2.201	
	Female (n=38)	10.71	2.670	

Df= 98

Source: Field Data

**Findings:** The Table 3 indicates the relationship between the gender of the respondents and their perception on the various components of viral marketing. It is identified that, there is no significant relationship between the gender of the consumers and their perception on the components like General, E-mails, Videos, Social networking Websites, Blogs and Forums. Hence, the perception of the respondents on viral marketing does not significantly vary according to their gender. So the null hypothesis is accepted and research hypothesis is rejected.

**Findings:** The Table 4 indicates that difference between the domicile of the respondents and their

perception on the various components of viral marketing. It is inferred that, there is no significant difference between the domicile of the consumers and their level of perception the components of viral marketing like General, E-mails, Videos, Blogs, Social networking Websites and Forums. Hence, there is no significant difference in the perception of respondents on viral marketing according to their domicile. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted and research hypothesis is rejected.

Since Emails, Videos, Blogs and Social networking websites do not fit well with the factor solutions, they are dropped from the analysis.

Table 4: Student 'T' – Test for the Difference Between the Domicile of the Respondents and Their Perception on the Various Components of Viral Marketing

Sl. No	Domicile	Mean	S.D	Statistical Inference
1.	General			T=.505 .614>0.05 Not Significant
	Urban (n=67)	39.75	4.832	
	Rural (n=33)	39.24	4.373	
2.	E-mails			T=-1.303 .196>0.05 Not Significant
	Urban (n=67)	21.43	3.500	
	Rural (n=33)	22.36	3.050	
3.	Videos			T=-.675 .501>0.05 Not Significant
	Urban (n=67)	14.66	2.556	
	Rural (n=33)	15.03	2.698	
4.	Blogs			T=.890 .376>0.05 Not Significant
	Urban (n=67)	9.54	2.439	
	Rural (n=33)	9.09	2.185	
5.	Social networking websites			T=.295 .768>0.05 Not Significant
	Urban (n=67)	15.75	2.566	
	Rural (n=33)	15.58	3.000	
6.	Forums			T=1.056 .294>0.05 Not Significant
	Urban (n=67)	10.78	2.473	
	Rural (n=33)	10.24	2.166	

Df = 98

Source: Field Data

Table 5: Factor Analysis of the Provinces of Viral Marketing

	Communalities	
	Initial	Extraction
General	1.000	0.644
E-mails	1.000	0.507
Videos	1.000	0.573
Blogs	1.000	0.574
Social Networking Websites	1.000	0.579
Forums	1.000	0.736

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.403	48.615	48.615	3.403	48.615	48.615
2	1.209	17.264	65.879	1.209	17.264	65.879
3	0.871	12.445	78.324			
4	0.570	8.141	86.465			
5	0.525	7.496	93.961			
6	0.423	6.039	100.000			
7	-1.985E-16	-2.835E-15	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Component Matrix(a)

	Component	
	1	2
General	0.802	-3.190E-02
E-mails	0.679	-0.214
Videos	0.635	-0.412
Blogs	0.450	0.610
Social networking websites	0.701	-0.298
Forums	0.454	0.728

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a 2 components extracted.

Source: Field data

The total variance table explains that the components which provide around 66 per cent of the results are selected for further analysis.

**Findings:** The Table 5 gives the inference that the areas General Perception, E-mails, Videos and Social networking websites fall under the first factor/component. The areas such as Blogs and Forums fall under the second factor/component. Following this categorization the components can be arranged according to the descending order from General perception, Forums, Social networking websites, Emails, Videos, to Blogs. Hence, any further study conducted in future on analyzing any aspect of viral marketing taking up these major areas may focus its inquiry according to the above said order of priority.

**Contributions by the Researcher:** From the analyses and findings of the study the following suggestions have been proposed:

It may be suggested to the corporate bodies that by displaying a new viral marketing idea on a web site through any viral marketing tool like face book and other social networking sites, business can reach out to customers effectively. Providing proper Advertisement plays prime role in communicating, connecting people and promoting business. It provides minimum cost and effective marketing strategies for better awareness of products and increased sales. By increasing useful content in newsletter, it increases the number of viewers in websites. Introducing an interesting and attractive video recording clip on the website not only captures the attention but also generate more viewers. In order to facilitate the bloggers-consumers to interact with each other, tagging information in blogs is the best medium of spreading the message about the product and services.

It may be suggested to the consumers that, by using viral advertising techniques in social networking, the consumers are exposed to several products and services offered by various sources and it is very convenient and easy to access on any viral messages from internet. By utilizing free services, the consumers can make use of utmost resources provided on the internet, which encourages the consumers to retain loyalty towards the particular products and companies by identifying their logos & brands. And also, it gives the ability to capture the attention of consumer by their opinion and adding touches of humor into advertising.

It may be suggested to the government that, they must be aware of the misleading information about the product and services available in viral marketing. And, they should concentrate in Cyber laws and it must be

enforced in viral marketing campaigns, for reducing malpractices, fraud and misuses.

## CONCLUSION

The high speed spread of marketing information through the components of internet is viral marketing. The success of viral marketing depends on the level of perception among the consumers on its elements namely E-mails, videos, blogs, social networking's and forums. The results of the study signify that the level of perception on the tools of viral marketing among the individual consumers is relatively fair and average. But it is true that the business world, for the fastest and the widest reach, can effectively make use of the tools of viral marketing.

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