

THE STUDY OF THE FACTOR THAT INFLUENCE ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING AMONG GENERATION Y

Noorain Mohd Nordin

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka

Email: noorainnordin@melaka.uitm.edu.my

Munirah Mohamed

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka

Ezatul Hasanah Jaidon

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of internet and the use of e-commerce have made viral marketing an appealing marketing method for most firms and marketers to promote and advertise their products or services. However, before involving with viral marketing, firms and marketers need to learn and recognize whether the customers will react positively or negatively towards it. Thus, it is important for firms and marketers to understand the factor that influence customer's attitude towards viral marketing. In this research study, the purpose is to investigate and examine whether the factor of informativeness, entertainment, source credibility, and irritation will affect attitude towards viral marketing. This study was conducted to focus on the generation Y in Johor, Malaysia. Based on the results that have been retrieved in this study, it was found that the independent variable of source credibility has a significant relationship with the dependent variable of attitude towards viral marketing. While, the other independent variables which is informativeness, entertainment and irritation is found to have no significant effect on attitude towards viral marketing.

Keywords: *Viral Marketing, Informativeness, Entertainment, Source Credibility and Irritation.*

INTRODUCTION

Firms and marketers have used various type of marketing methods in order to increase their success in promoting and selling their products or services (Hill & O'Sullivan, 1999). By tradition, print advertisement and offline word-of-mouth were the marketing method that is frequently used by firms and marketers. However, as technology started to develop over the years, some other forms of marketing methods have been introduced. Internet have changed the way people communicate with each other by starting a new way of communicating which is through an online medium such as e-mail, direct message, blogs, and social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Ahlberg, 2018). This trend has eventually opened up the possibilities for people to communicate about things that are not entirely important, for instance,

e-mailing chain, which is when an e-mail receiver is requested to send copies of the e-mail to people they know (VanArsdale, 1998). The reason for mentioning this is to show that this is how the internet works nowadays, especially on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, where everyone is doing the same thing.

Making things “go viral” or “going viral” is one of the phrases used for viral marketing, where it is currently one of the modern methods for promotion of products and services by firms and marketers (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). The term viral marketing which also known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has turn out to be essential in the marketing trend for firms and marketers (Ferguson, 2008). This method has also the probable in reaching a much bigger audience than the traditional word-of-mouth. This is due to the reason that people are likely to have more ‘friends’ online, especially on their social network, than friends that they actually talk to in real life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

Previous researcher has stated that to promote any product or services efficiently, firms and marketers must first know their target audience (Ferguson, 2008). If firms and marketers have observed and found the active online customers, they need to take time and get to know their traits and habits by offering programs that allow them to engage further (Ferguson, 2008). In this research study, researcher is focusing on the ‘internet’ generation who are also known as Generation Y which is those who were born after 1981 (Zhang, Abound Omran, & Cobanoglu, 2017). Generation Y is one of the unique groups that have been participated by marketers and firms in order recognize their attitudes and behaviours (Zhang et al., 2017).

The problem with viral marketing is that, many firms and marketers can easily promote their product using viral marketing method, and if an inappropriate product are being promoted using this marketing method, a counter-productive effect might happen and resulting an unfavorable attitude towards those products (Leskovec, Adamic, & Huberman, 2005). The dangers that people may overlooked is that it might create negative word-of-mouth instead of positive word-of-mouth regarding the product and brand. Besides, a negative viral marketing seems to be spreading more easily and much faster than the positive ones (Kiss & Bicher, 2008). Besides that, the pictures and messages used in the viral marketing can be misunderstood by the users and receivers (Kirby & Marsden, 2006). This could result in a negative impact on the company’s brand image and will lead to a loss of brand control (Woerdl et al., 2008).

This research study drives to investigate and understand the factor that influence the customer attitude towards viral marketing. This is to show whether the existence of factors affect positively or negatively towards the targeted customers and represent a beneficial opportunity to keep advertising research up to date with the new technology and the new online marketing platform. Currently, even though there is an increasing popularity for viral marketing, surprisingly, there are still very little research on it especially focusing on Generation Y attitudes towards viral marketing. Moreover, this study can provide significant information to the firms, and marketers to help them take advantage of the benefits of viral marketing (Petrescu, 2012). Thus, it is essential for the researcher to investigate the factor that influence Generation Y attitudes towards viral marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitude Towards Viral Marketing

Attitude is an important concept in marketing when doing any kind of research. This is because, attitude play as an object in relation to customer orientation which is referred as marketing related concepts such as a product, product category, brand, service, and product use. In addition, it relates to the feelings, beliefs and the behavioural intentions of the customers towards the product or services (Wang et al., 2018). Attitude are learned through direct experience or through observation. As most firms and marketers have used the advantage of viral marketing to promote and advertise their product, customer whether satisfied or unsatisfied can also share their experience to many other people using social networks (Tomislav Sudarevic, Branislav Vlahovic, 2013). Customer's attitude towards advertising is one of the influential indicators of viral marketing campaign's effectiveness because the customer's cognitive ability towards the viral content are reflected in their thoughts and feelings and subsequently will influence their attitude towards the viral marketing campaign (Ling, Piew, & Chai, 2010). In order to further spread viral content, or to make a viral campaign successful, it must achieve a very positive effect.

Informativeness

Informativeness is defined numerously by previous researchers as the capability of firms and marketers in creating an advertisement and marketing content that can inform the targeted customers regarding their product or service to achieve the highest possible satisfaction (Ducoffe & Curlo, 2000). Similarly, (Oh & Xu, 2003) has defined informativeness as the ability of firms and marketers to successfully give the related information to the targeted customers. Furthermore, previous researcher has agreed that it is important for firms and marketers to provide a complete and comprehensive information to the targeted customers (Majedul Huq, 2015). This is because, the main goal in creating an advertisement for the viral marketing campaign is to inform the targeted audience about the firms and marketer's new products or new features of an existing products. This includes making the audience aware if there are any changes regarding the price of the products (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Moreover, if firms and marketers include the informativeness element in their advertisement for the viral marketing campaign, it will be able to change the customer's attitude, acknowledgement, and satisfaction as a reflection towards the resources given (Wang et al., 2018).

Entertainment

Viral marketing campaign that have the element of surprise, joy, and entertainment have a great significant influence on the customer's attitudes towards viral marketing (Wei, 2014). Entertainment is defined as something that people found to be entertaining, funny, exciting, eye-catching, and amusing (Tsang et al., 2004). There must be a reason for any person to take part in a viral marketing campaign willingly. There are many factors that can be the reason for a person to share the viral marketing content to their friends and family (Wijs, 2017). Entertainment may have been one of the factors for people to participate in the spread of viral marketing content. According to (Gangadharbatla & Lisa, 2007) firms and marketers that provides advertisement and websites that improve their visitors' sense of control, entertainment, interactivity, and brand

experiences are most likely to attract positive customer's attitudes. This then results in an actual acceptance of the product and service by the targeted customers, that have been offered by firms and marketers through their campaign and sites (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). Moreover, the entertainment element will eventually add value for the customers and increases the customer's loyalty for the product or service, thus, leading to a positive customer's attitude (Faraz Saadeghvaziri, 2001). The element of entertainment is seen to be capable of leading major impact on the customer's response towards viral marketing, therefore, it is important to include it in the advertisement for the viral marketing campaign.

Source Credibility

Source credibility is an important part in numerous marketing contexts and online environments (Jin, 2010). Source credibility can be relating to the trust of receiver of the information towards the source of it (Ohanian, 1990). Similarly, (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989) defined it as customer's perception towards the honesty and reliability of the advertisement made by the firms and marketers. Basically, source credibility means how much does the receiver of advertisements trusted the sender, which reveals the mind-set of the receiver of the content to the sender. It also represents customer's attitude in relation to the source of the content (Esmaeilpour & Aram, 2016). According to previous studies, researchers have mention that source credibility as trustworthiness can also be link to perceived risk (Wang et al., 2018). This mean that, if it is confirmed that the content of the advertisement come from an actual trustworthy source, then the perceived risk related with the viral content is low (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). Customers will tend to feel uncertain and have no privacy concerns when they receive the advertising content from their social network. This shows that the value of advertisement would impact on the receiver more strongly, if they have high credibility in the advertisement (Palka et al., 2009). Hence, the higher the source credibility of the marketing tools, the higher is the impact on customers' attitude (Haghirian et al., 2005).

Irritation

Irritation in the context of viral marketing campaign is referred to as when firms and marketers use tactics or strategies that can annoy, offend, insult or overly manipulate customers through their advertising content (Ducoffe, 1996). Additionally, the feeling of having your intelligence belittled, getting annoying messages and irritating provocations are the elements of irritation (Brackett & Carr, 2001). As the advertising content provided in the marketing campaign may have a numerous range of information in it, it may easily confuse, distract and overload the receivers with too much information. Thus, resulting in a negative reaction by customers towards the advertising in the viral marketing campaign (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). There are still many customers that are not quite comfortable and sure with the concept and idea of viral marketing due to the reason that the customers still feel uncertain and unsure whether the advertisement content that have been upload by the creator are trustable and reliable (Siau & Shen, 2003). Thus, by using irritation as a technique in the viral marketing campaign will only worsen the scenario and making customers act and behave negatively towards viral marketing campaign. Firms and marketers can reduce irritation by delivering an appropriate advertisement content that can provide relevant value to the targeted audience (Haghirian et al., 2005). In addition, irritation that were caused from any form of viral marketing campaign such as through SMS, video, e-mail, or blog, can be lessen if firms and marketers use the permission-based marketing concept (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). For example, in the situation of SMS advertising, there should be an in advance

notification sent to the customer asking permission whether they could send their advertisement to the customer through SMS. This is where the customer can either accept or decline on receiving the overflowing advertisement in the form of SMS from the firms and marketers (Salem, 2016).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from the sample using the validated and reliable research instrument. After the data were collected, they were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analysis. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, while multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the contributions of each of the significant predictors or independent variables towards the variance in the criterion or dependent variable. The target populations of this study are the Generation Y around Johor. According to (Malhotra & Birks, 2003), lesser group of population has the capability to make the reasoning or proof that will represent a bigger group of population to draft a sample. From this statement, 120 respondents have been chosen to represent the total population of Generation Y. For this study, the sampling method that will be use by researcher is convenience sampling under non-probability technique. The research instrument that will be use in this study is questionnaire. The questionnaire that is used in this research study will be classified into two section and other several parts.

First, Section A contain the demographic background of the respondents. It consists of gender, race, age, marital status, and occupation of the respondents. Next, Section B is aimed to examine and evaluate the dependent variable and independent variable. The sources of the constructed instrument used on this research study were adopted from (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). The data were analyzed using the SPSS reliability and, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability was derived. The reliability index Cronbach's Alpha of the instrument for attitude towards viral marketing was 0.717 while for independent variables which consist of informativeness (0.771), entertainment (0.716), source credibility (0.787) and irritation (0.791).

FINDINGS

The study identified a relationship among the factors (informativeness, entertainment, source credibility, irritation) and attitude towards viral marketing. In achieving this, Pearson r correlation coefficients between each pair of variables were examined. As depicted in Table 1, informativeness ($r = 0.262$), entertainment ($r = 0.288$), source credibility ($r = 0.341$) at the 0.5 level of significance were positively but low relationship related attitude towards viral marketing. While irritation factor result showed ($r = -0.48$) with ($p = 0.600$) which is more than 0.05 indicates that there was no significance, but the R-value showed moderate relationship. Researcher from previous study have also conclude that irritation does not have any significant impact on the dependent variable of attitude towards viral marketing (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). The findings from this research study point out that most of Generation Y does not have positive attitude towards viral marketing. This is shown through the result where the independent variable of informativeness, entertainment, and irritation does not significantly affect the dependent variable of attitude towards viral marketing.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Informativeness, Entertainment, Source Credibility, Irritation with Attitude towards Viral Marketing

Variables	r-value	Result
Informativeness	0.262	Low Relationship
Entertainment	0.288	Low Relationship
Source Credibility	0.341	Low Relationship
Irritation	-0.48	Moderate Relationship

In relation to the question of what the best predictor for explaining attitude towards viral marketing, a multiple regressions analysis was conducted. Table 2 shows the results of regression analysis of the four independent variables which is informativeness, entertainment, source credibility, and irritation regressed against dependent variable which is attitude towards viral marketing. Based on the table, the value for informativeness is ($\beta = 0.077$) with ($\rho = 0.489$) which is more than 0.05. Thus, it indicates that there is no significant relationship between informativeness and attitude towards viral marketing. The value for entertainment is ($\beta = 0.129$) with ($\rho = 0.238$) which is more than 0.05 indicates that there is no significant relationship between entertainment and attitude towards viral marketing. Next, the value for source credibility is ($\beta = 0.235$) with ($\rho = 0.029$) which is less than 0.05. Therefore, it indicates that there is a significant relationship between source credibility and attitude towards viral marketing. Lastly, the value for irritation is ($\beta = -0.044$) with ($\rho = 0.620$) which is more than 0.05. Thus, it indicates that, there is no significant relationship between irritation and attitude towards viral marketing.

Table 2: Regression Analysis Summary for Attitude Towards Viral Marketing

Variables	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Sig.	R ²
(Constant)		0.002	0.140
Informativeness	0.077	0.489	
Entertainment	0.129	0.238	
Source Credibility	0.235	0.029	
Irritation	-0.044	0.620	

As shown in Table 2, R² is only equal to 14.0% which informed that 14.0% of R² is influenced by the informativeness, entertainment, source credibility and irritation. Therefore, another balance of 86.0% is left to be explained by another factors. To conclude, source credibility is the most significant predictor variable that affected attitude towards viral marketing with the value of Beta Coefficient (0.235) or 23.5% and significant at 0.029. The only independent variable that shows a positive outcome in this research study is, source credibility. Source credibility plays as the significant predictor in this research study as the results shows that the Generation Y respondents tend to only believe and trust advertising content that they received from reliable and trusted sources. This study findings are seen to be similar to the findings of previous study

(Zernigah & Sohail, 2012) as their research outcomes also showed a positive effect of source credibility on attitude towards viral marketing.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this research study, it was found that there is a similar and differences in the results between the present study and the past one. The different outcomes can be resulted from so many reasons. One of the most obvious reasons is the different culture in the country that the research study took place. For instance, the current research study targeted on the people in Johor, Malaysia, while previous study was conducted in Pakistan (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). It shows that, the different culture in the country might cause dissimilar way of thinking and actions of the targeted respondents. Besides, viral marketing is a marketing method that has not been entirely explored and still new for the people in Malaysia, thus, it is probably unfamiliar for the respondent to answer the question provided in the questionnaire.

A successful viral marketing will influence the growth of firms and marketers especially in terms of sales and brand recognition. Hence, for the firms and marketers, knowing their targeted customer's attitude and behaviour is an important part to make the viral marketing campaign a success. The results of this research illustrate that, having a high source credibility is an important factor for a viral marketing campaign to gain positive feedback. Therefore, it is suggested to the firms and marketers to create and distribute all their viral marketing messages and content in a more credible source. This includes, providing an informative, enjoyable, realistic, and not to forget truthful contents to the targeted customers. Additionally, adding a permission-based marketing concept in the viral marketing campaign may also lead to a more positive attitude towards viral marketing. Firms and marketers need to build up their credibility which means, they need to make an advertisement or viral marketing campaign that are convincing to its targeted customers or audience. Being honest in the process of making it is very important to achieve credibility (Le & Nguyen, 2014).

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