

The Impact of Persuasion and Uncertainty on Perception of Viral Marketing Activities

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Abstract: Recent time, it's very normal to people to visit Internet to get information about books, searching for countries where they want to go, studying for lessons, checking for weather and even seeking partners for a relationship. Thus, Internet related strategies are become vital weapon to companies. Therefore, they are increasingly using viral marketing in their communication strategies. However, it's still uncertain that what people's perception of these viral marketing activities. In this study, the aim is to investigate the effect of persuasion and uncertainty on perception of viral marketing activities. As expected, the findings support that persuasion has both a positive and negative effects on perception of viral marketing activities and uncertainty has positive effect on perception of viral marketing.

Key words: viral marketing; persuasion; perception; uncertainty

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1. Introduction

It's very normal to people to visit Internet to get information about books, searching for countries where they want to go, studying for lessons, checking for weather and even seeking partners for a relationship (Shankar, Smith & Rangaswamy, 2003; Rainie, 2005). Those, Internet is a kind of source of entertainment, communication, information, news, experiences and recommendations for both consumers and marketers (Watts & Peretti, 2007). By the evolution of the Internet, e-mail, web 2.0 and social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Camarero & Jose, 2011, p. 2292), new form of markets which consumers and marketers meet in is called e-marketing and in the concept of e-marketing, virtual communication is called as viral marketing (Watts & Peretti, 2007).

The term of viral marketing is first used by Steve Jurvetson and Tim Draper in 1997. Viral marketing is a marketing strategy that encourages consumers sharing marketing messages to other consumers who are connected with web ties. And like a virus, information about the firm and its brand messages, products and services is spread to potential buyers and consumers are exposed and influenced by messages. Those, a huge network is created rapidly and this is an advance strategy of rapid multiplication to explode messages to millions (Dobeles, Toleman & Beverland, 2005; Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005; Kirby & Marsden, 2006).

Viral marketing is recent phenomenon in marketing literature, therefore some of the researches can use

different name such as word-of-mouth (Goldenberg, Libai & Muller, 2001), Buzz marketing (Thomas, 2004), stealth marketing (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004) and word-of-mouth marketing (Kozinets et al., 2010). However, considering the rapid spread and infectiousness of messages, it's called viral marketing (Kaplan & Naentein, 2011, p. 256).

Viral marketing is described as word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in situations where positive network effects prevail and where the role of the influencer is active due to positive network effects (Vilpponen et al., 2006). In accordance with the definitions, viral marketing is an electronic word-of-mouth whereby some form of related to a brand, firm and product/services is transmitted in an exponentially growing way through virtual worlds (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Messages pass more than one person and it's viewed with an increasing rate between peer-to-peer connections. For viral marketing it's essential to take place in social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. are also called Internet based social applications or new media tools (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011, p. 255).

Viral marketing relies on provocative content to motivate unpaid link to link communications among social networking sites of persuasive messages from identified sponsors (Porter & Gollan, 2006). In this manner, marketers have to persuade consumers, with the support of Internet Technologies using networking connections (Xia & Bechwati, 2008). Thus, that's why Social media marketing and viral marketing can be used interchangeably (Kozinets, 2010).

There are many form of viral marketing that used in advertising which are information sources to consumers about products and services (Vilpponen, Winter & Sundqvist, 2006). Consumers rely on viral marketing more than on other communication sources and they are seeking information before purchase behavior (Furse, Punj & Stewart, 1984; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger & Yale, 1998). Viral marketing is a process of getting customers to pass along a company's marketing messages to friends, families and their networking connections (Laudon & Traves, 2001, p. 381). In 2010, Procter & Gamble uploaded a 30 second video in Youtube and it was a promotion of its Old Spice brand which was entitled The Man Your Man Could Smell Like. It was viewed 23 million time in 36 hours which means 15 million infection per day (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2011, p. 253).

Despite the increasing use of viral marketing, it's still not clear how effective is viral marketing and there is still only a limited understanding of how it works (Borroff, 2000; Helm, 2000; Diorio, 2001; Godes et al., 2005). All we know is viral marketing rely on peer-to-peer recommendation and thus this is increasing the credibility of the messages (Helm, 2000). People are influenced by others and ties among people whether it's strong or weak effect their purchase decisions, actions, and opinions due to recommendation given by a friend or trusted acquaintance (Jurvetson, 2000). Thus, certainty is an important issue for consumers to believe and viral marketing influence the post-usage perceptions of products (Bone, 1995).

To sum up of all definitions about viral marketing, it allows to firms to promote their products and services with a low budget and it still has a same and indeed high level of awareness with TV advertising (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011, p. 254). Yet it's not certain that how much viral marketing's persuasion and uncertainty can affect the perception of messages. This research is try to clarify this question and testing the model given in Figure 1.

1.1 Persuasion and Uncertainty

Perception is a stage of processing of the senses. Perception is the awareness or understanding of sensory information. In Latin, perceptio or percipio means apprehension with mind or senses (Krishna, 2012, p. 334). Especially visual perception is important within the domain of consumer behavior because it affects judgments of products and consumption (Chandon & Wansik, 2007; Chandon & Ordabayeva, 2009; Krider, Raghubir & Krishna, 2001).

In marketing, good messages have to be persuasive and messages should be uncertainty to create positive perceptions on consumer's mind. Hence, it's the important issue to examine how messages are persuasive and it should be uncertainty to create convincing (Okumus, 2011). The effective advertising is always persuasive and it contains no uncertainty in messages. If an advertising doesn't provide these 2 statements, companies can miss an opportunity to reach to consumers (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2004, p. ix).

Making advertising credibility and building perception are really difficult issues. Persuasion and uncertainty together can be defined as the process of trying to alter, modify, or change the saliency of the values, wants, beliefs and actions to others, it's the major focus of marketing (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2004). There is uncertainty with regard to the product experience attributes, the actual value of the product to the customer is unknown. Thus, it's better to convince consumers and create persuasive messages to prevent uncertainty (Kalish, 1985, p. 1572).

2. The Method

The aim of this study is to find the effect of persuasion and uncertainty on the perception of viral marketing. In the study, questions in the scales were developed from previous studies and applied on a sample via convenience sampling method from university students who are participated in e-marketing, advertising and marketing in social media courses because of their knowledge on viral marketing advertisements, relative homogeneity as a group and accessibility (Calder et al., 1981). Respondents were asked to evaluate the questions in survey and Likert scale was used (1: Strongly Not agree; 2: Somewhat Not agree; 3: Neutral; 4: Somewhat agree; 5: Strongly Agree). There are 2 independent variables (persuasion and uncertainty) and one dependent variable (perception of viral advertising (VM)). The first part of scale persuasion has 11 statements and adopted from Okumus (2011), uncertainty has 14 statements and adopted from Obermiller and Spangenberg's (1998) study which was also used and formed in Ergec's (2009) research. Finally, perception scale has 13 statements and it was adopted from Okumus's et al. (2011) study.

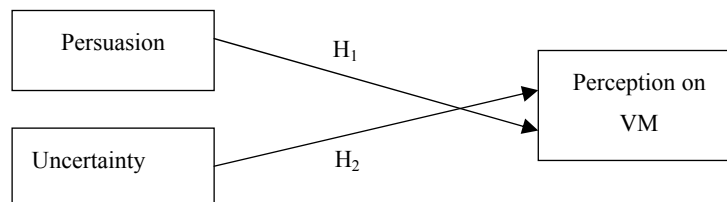


Figure 1 The Model of Research

H₁: Persuasion has effect on Perception of Viral Marketing

H₂: Uncertainty has effect on Perception of Viral Marketing

3. Results

In this study, a total 300 students were included. However 35 surveys were deleted and 265 surveys were analyzed. With regard to gender, 68% of the sample is female and 32% is male. Majority of the sample is between 21-23 years old (74%) and half of the sample has less than 500 TL (55%) and other half has 501-1500 (41%) per month as a personal allowance. Due to the results, majority of people (63%) are online 2 and 4 hours in a day.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Sample

ITEM	Frequency	%
Age		
18	8	3
19	10	4
20	24	9
21	62	23
22	87	33
23	54	20
24	15	6
25	3	1
Gender		
Female	180	68
Male	84	32
Income		
0-500	145	
501-1500		
Online		
Up to 1 Hour	29	11
2-4 hours	166	63
5-7 hours	51	19
8-10 hours	16	8
11-more hours	3	1

3.1 Validity and Reliability

In order to test the validity and reliability exploratory factor analysis (EFA), reliability test and finally confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used.

We consulted to EFA with varimax rotation, and factor loadings of ≥ 0.40 were used as comparison and in Table 2 profiles of each factor are shown. The results show 11 statements of persuasion scale were divided into 2 subgroups. From the questions we can see persuasion of viral marketing has both negative and positive effect on consumers' mind which occurred as like and dislike. For the uncertainty scale, 14 statements were loaded to 1 factor and 13 statements of perception of viral marketing scale were loaded to 1 factor.

Table 2 Profiles of Each Factors

Factors	Loading	Mean	Std. D.
Persuasion			
Factor 1 (Positive)			
1- I am searching social media for watching viral marketing.	0.693	2.0755	1.07042
3- I am reading viral marketing as a reading story.	0.634	2.3623	1.23279
4- When I decide to purchase a product, I consult to information providing from viral marketing.	0.703	2.3887	1.16282
5- When I decide to buy a new product, I consult to websites viral marketing which include investigations about it.	0.390	3.2264	1.20983
6- I prefer to watch viral marketing than asking for friends when I decided to buy a product.	0.561	2.3774	1.09105
7- When I see a viral marketing about a product, I urgently try to buy it.	0.770	1.9358	1.00361
8- When I look back to products I bought, I definitely saw them in viral marketing.	0.764	1.9547	0.97983
Factor 2 (Negative)			
2- I always shut the website that includes viral marketing up.	0.689	2.8453	1.31808
9- Viral marketing has no persuasion on me.	0.725	2.8415	1.24216
10- Viral marketing that includes stories, reports and public spots have no persuasion on me.	0.729	3.0415	1.20376
11- I prefer more information than entertainment.	0.406	3.0264	1.18516
Uncertainty			
1- In viral marketing, celebrated people are used for convincing people.	0.674	3.5312	1.26128
2- Viral marketing is entertainment for convincing people.	0.729	3.5396	1.09031
3- Viral marketing shows people how to use a product for convincing them.	0.717	3.4679	1.00750
4- In viral marketing, cartoons are used for convincing people.	0.555	3.2717	1.03433

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5- In viral marketing, there is a comparison between rivals for convincing people.	0.642	3.4377	1.10307
6- Viral marketing use similarities between our friends and us for convincing us.	0.563	3.3925	1.12678
7- Viral marketing tries to take attention.	0.729	3.9208	1.03231
8- The aim of viral marketing is desire.	0.776	3.9849	1.00743
9- The aim of viral marketing is giving information.	0.702	3.5774	1.06363
10- The aim of viral marketing is ingratiation.	0.543	3.2830	1.20569
11- The aim of viral marketing is making us more familiar with a product.	0.718	3.5811	1.14234
12- The aim of viral marketing is making the product more memorable.	0.743	3.7962	1.03535
13- The aim of viral marketing is making us to believe what they say.	0.740	3.7321	1.05525
14- The aim of viral marketing is making us to believe that if use this product we will feel us better.	0.730	3.6038	1.15371
Perception			
1- Viral marketing gives us enough information.	0.665	2.7434	1.03454
2- Viral marketing gives information about benefits of a product.	0.656	2.8189	1.02119
3- Viral marketing is different from than other advertising media sources (TV. radio, magazine).	0.625	3.1472	0.99860
4- Viral marketing has convincing advertisings.	0.804	2.8491	1.01869
5- Viral marketing has appealing offers for me.	0.777	2.8491	1.02979
6- Viral marketing has attractive advertisings.	0.718	3.0755	1.05617
7- In generally, I like content of viral marketing.	0.777	2.8075	1.04661
8- Information from viral marketing is changing my mind to positive about a product.	0.760	2.6226	1.01925
9- Viral marketing can change my purchase decision.	0.691	2.5660	1.10284
10- Viral marketing is quite simply.	0.474	2.7245	0.94727
11- Viral marketing is really entertaining and has visual appearance.	0.671	3.0377	1.02548
12- Viral marketing has an understanding content.	0.656	2.8943	0.95949
13- I am always searching for viral marketing.	0.678	2.3396	1.12384

For the reliability of scales was determined by computing KMO scores and cronbach's alphas which were shown in Table 3. As can be seen all scales have acceptable alpha values.

Table 3 Reliability Scores for Scales

Factors	KMO	Chi-square	α	Eigen values	Variance Explained (%)
Persuasion	0.738	618.166		1.852	45
Positive			0.765		
Negative			0.565		
Uncertainty	0.903	1847.397	0.911	6.606	47
Perception	0.923	1577.630	0.908	6.250	48

In addition to EFA and reliability analysis, CFA was used to test the model's compatibility. The scale of persuasion, uncertainty and perception are acceptable at $X^2/df \leq 4-5$.

Table 4 CFA Scores for Scales

Factor	X^2/df	P	GFI	CFI	NFI	AGFI
Persuasion	4.163	0.0001	0.903	0.784	0.739	0.848
Uncertainty	4.988	0.0001	0.825	0.845	0.814	0.755
Perception	3.208	0.0001	0.894	0.906	0.870	0.852

3.2 Path Diagram Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Path diagram analysis was applied to examine the hypothesis. The results are shown in table results. Acceptance of hypothesis $t \geq 1.96$ and $p \leq 0.05$ were used as comparison line. The fit statistics of the model $X^2/df = 1.779$, GFI = 0.813, CFI = 0.880 and AGFI = 0.787 indicated that the model is accurated.

Table 5 Model Fit Index

	Index	Acceptable Index
X^2/df	1.779	$\leq 4-5$
GFI	0.813	$\geq 0.89-0.85$
CFI	0.880	$\geq 0.89-0.85$
AGFI	0.787	$\geq 0.89-0.85$

The path between positive persuasion and perception is significant ($t = 5.774$, $p = 0.0001$, $\beta = 0.456$), supporting H_{1a} . The path between negative persuasion and perception is significant ($t = 2.099$, $p = 0.036$, $\beta = -0.466$), supporting H_{1b} . The path between uncertainty and perception is significant ($t = 4.830$, $p = 0.0001$, $\beta = 0.255$), supporting H_2 . In Figure 2, all the scores are shown for each path.

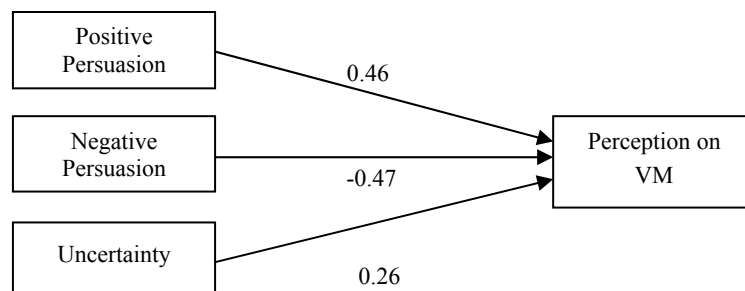


Figure 2 The Final Model of the Research

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to determine the effects of persuasion and uncertainty of perception of viral advertising activities. Due to the results, persuasion has two sides -positive and negative- on consumer's mind. Positive persuasion has positive effect on perception of viral marketing. However, negative persuasion has negative effect on perception. On the other hand, uncertainty has positive effect on perception of viral marketing. Therefore, when a firm increases its positive persuasion and/or uncertainty, it can increase its perception of viral marketing activities. In contrast to positive persuasion and uncertainty, negative persuasion decreases the perception of viral marketing activities.

Our findings show that people are more likely to believe viral marketing activities that contain entertainment and have more details and using celebrities. However, viral marketing activities have less effect on purchase decision. People who participate in social media tools are agreed on viral marketing activities try to catch consumer attention and viral marketing activities try to create desire on consumers. On the other hand, respondents point out viral marketing activities are trying to increase rememberability of a product/service and the aim of viral marketing activities are to make the people believe what they say. In addition to, people are really enjoy with viral marketing activities and they find the viral marketing activities differ than other types of advertising (news paper, radio, tv). Unfortunately, people are not always eager to check for all viral marketing activities.

In postmodern era, people are searching information via Internet technologies. Thus, viral marketing activities are giving an opportunity to people to gain deeply knowledge about a product/service. In that manner, viral marketing activities have to be constructed on more information about a product/service. Those, these kind of virals can be more favorable among consumers. In addition to, people are always online. Internet based

technologies have inevitable place in most people's daily life. This condition makes people intimated with online advertisings. Accordingly, well-designed viral marketing activities can make people more familiar with products/service. However, consumers complain about advertising are convincing them. Therefore, viral marketing advertisings have to more realistic and information based such as contain benefits of a product. Herewith, consumers can be appealed and trust can be constructed through the company.

Consequently, a firm that use viral marketing has to increase positive persuasion and reduce the uncertainty to increase perception. One way to increase perception is not using celebrated people. In accordance with results, people are not feel their self in comfort when celebrated people are used in viral marketing activities. Hence, for reducing uncertainty and persuasion, companies have to choose a performer from public not from celebrate people. Performer from public will make viral marketing activities more reliable and desired. On the other hand, visual appearance is the key factor for success of viral marketing activities and these activities should entertain people while watching them. Enjoyable and time spending viral marketing activities can be memorable and can catch consumers' attention easily.

Finally, viral marketing activities have to define its target consumers and put worth their needs. Results show that people are not only searching for an advertising but also searching for deep information. Thereof, viral marketing activities have to be combined with product/service information and make people believe that these activities are genuine one that consumers need. Otherwise, people have no longer intention to search and follow companies viral marketing activities.

Some of the limitations of this research should be mentioned. Due to the small sample size, we cannot generalize the findings. However, there are important indications and implications for companies that want to increase their effectiveness on communication.

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