

## MODELING THE ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES OF VIRAL MARKETING VIDEO

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*Advancements in communication technology have given rise to the evolution of a new form of marketing -Viral Marketing. In modern times, viral marketing is considered as an effective marketing tool that offers valuable possibilities for the marketers in terms of reach, speed and cost efficiency. This paper measures the influence of message attributes and source credibility on viral marketing video, which in turn affects the effectiveness of viral marketing video. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis techniques were applied to explore and to confirm the constructs. Then structural equation model was developed to know the causal relationship among different constructs under study. The results of path analysis reveal that message attributes have more influence in explaining the effectiveness of viral marketing. It was also found that viral marketing video as independent variable has significant effect on attention, interest, intentions of the consumers to purchase and to spread word- of -mouth for the product being advertised. However, it does not affect the other factors much as in comparison to the factor "the generation of interest".*

**Key words:** Viral Marketing, Viral Video, Electronic Word- of -Mouth

### INTRODUCTION

Technology outburst and latest modes of communication has brought a new revolution in the world of communication. The technological paradigm shift has brought a lot of change in varied forms of communication which has enabled the consumers to share their product evaluations online (Chen and Xie, 2008; Rune and Vinberg, 2009). In today's increasingly competitive business environment where the sender-receiver relationship between a company and the consumer does not much exist, the oral person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator is considered as the most powerful marketing tool. The receiver perceives this communication as non-

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commercial regarding a brand, product or service (Dobele et al., 2007; Arndt, 1967). The electronic word-of-mouth communication that encourages the consumers to pass along company developed products and services or even audio, video, or written information to others online is known as Viral Marketing (Kotler et al., 2009). Viral marketing is a relatively new tool in marketing communication toolbox that offers valuable possibilities for marketers in terms of reach, speed and cost efficiency as compared to traditional advertising (Sprong, 2010; Rune and Vinberg, 2009). Therefore, viral marketing as a comprehensive strategy includes a number of viral components in it (Golan and Zaidner, 2008).

Ultimately, the goal of the marketers interested in creating successful viral marketing programs is to identify the individuals with high Social Networking Potential (SNP) and to create viral messages that appeal to this segment of population and have a high probability of being passed along ([www.reference.com](http://www.reference.com)). Gholamzadeh and Jakobsson (2011) claimed that viral message designed according to AIDA (a well-known advertising model) plays a significant role in taking the consumers from the awareness level to purchase & word-of-mouth intentions. Further, the viral videos designed on the parameters of AIDA have one more aim in addition to influence the purchase intentions of the consumers i.e. to motivate the consumers to spread word-of mouth for the products being advertised by the organisations.

Ramaswamy and Namakumari (2002) opined that message and the source (the endorser of the message) are the two major components of an advertisement that bring about audience persuasion. Lethagen and Modig (2008) claimed that message content having features of novelty, meaningfulness, humour, positiveness and well craftiness are more effective in promoting ad and brand attitudes, brand interest, purchase intentions, ad and brand WOM intentions. Sanayei et al. (2013) found that message attribute emerged as a significant factor in advertising effectiveness. This includes being understandable, message attractiveness and positive content of the advertisement.

Fairbank (2008) studied the effectiveness of viral marketing on the internet in generating potential sales and increasing brand awareness. He suggested that to increase sales the organisations need to create viral marketing material in such a way that enables the consumers to identify the products being promoted by them. In similar manner, Rune and Vinberg (2009) conducted an experimental study to measure the impact of viral video on brand attitude of the group and found that the content of the video influences brand attitude positively and this consequently leads to rise in consumers' product

purchase intentions and intentions to share viral videos.

Phelps et.al (2004) found that the messages containing content of strong emotions such as humour, fear, sadness or inspiration are more likely to be forwarded. Dobele et al. (2007) suggested surprise as an important element that must be combined with other emotions while creating viral messages. Further, Fairbank Victoria (2008) opined that entertainment is one of the most important motivational factors that influence the viewers' decisions to forward the video to their friends.

Though content is considered as the most important factor to make a video go viral but Rune and Vinberg (2009) elaborated their study by finding out other content related factors that must be taken into account while constructing more successful viral video campaign. These factors include low level of provocation together with a sense of authenticity, ad creativity, perceived production quality etc. Izawa M (2010) also supported the findings of Rune and Vinberg by stating that people tend to share that content which they found more enjoyable, intense, informative and less provocative.

Furthermore, Hsieh et.al (2012) explored the disseminating behaviours associated with eWOM marketing. They found the positive influence of perceived humour and multimedia effects on recipients' attitude toward a received online video and forwarding intentions in comparison to the construct "awareness of persuasive intent" that have negative effect on these intentions as the overuse of viral marketing to push products eliminates the viral effect. Thus to take advantage of the power of online viral dissemination, the message developers have to design their video as per the perception of the recipients.

Thus, in addition to content of the message, source of the message is also an important determinant of audience persuasion. Research has shown that source credibility (like level of expertise, trustworthiness, culture, age and educational level) has great deal of persuasive influence on the consumers. Of all these factors, trustworthiness of the source is considered as an important factor influencing the purchase decisions of the consumers. Dobele et al. (2007) acknowledged the importance of peer-to-peer recommendations and stated that viral marketing campaign or message triggering peer-to-peer recommendations increase the credibility of the message. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) also opined that with the growth and evolution of the internet, electronic peer-to-peer referrals have become an important phenomenon that influences the recipients' decision-making process. They asserted that unsolicited e-mails are more likely to be opened if they come from close and trusted sources, while the e-mails coming from

strangers or remote acquaintances would be anticipated as containing potentially less valuable or more suspicious information and hence more likely to be unopened.

Bansal and Voyer (2000) also found that when tie strength (the relationship between sender and receiver) is high, the receiver would attribute a greater level of credibility to the sender. Sprong (2010), from the study of Phelps et al.(2004) also claimed that positive effects associated with messages from credible sources could potentially weaken when consumers find out referral behaviour was stimulated by a commercial source.

Based on past studies, it can be well hypothesized that content of viral video and source credibility affect consumers' response in terms of attention to viral video, generation of interest in video, intentions to purchase product and to spread word of mouth for the advertised product. Although a number of studies have been found that explain the effectiveness of viral marketing videos but a very few comprehensive studies could be cited out which could explain the effectiveness of viral marketing video on consumers responses and intentions to spread word-of-mouth.

Hence, an attempt has been made in this direction to measure the effectiveness of message and source credibility on consumers' response process in terms of attention to viral marketing video, generation of interest in the viral video, product purchase intentions and intentions to spread word-of-mouth with regard to advertised product.

## **DATABASE & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study measures the effectiveness of viral marketing video on consumers' response process in two major districts of the state of Punjab i.e. Jalandhar and Ludhiana along with union territory of Chandigarh. A sample of 150 respondents was selected. These individuals were the regular users of "Facebook" a social networking site and video sharing platform "YouTube". Non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was used for sampling.

The viral marketing video of "Micromax Canvas HD" mobile phone was selected for the purpose of study by considering its message attributes and source credibility. The selection was based on the personal perceptions of the researcher and as well as the comments received relating to content of the message and number of "views" clicked on the video sharing site i.e. YouTube.

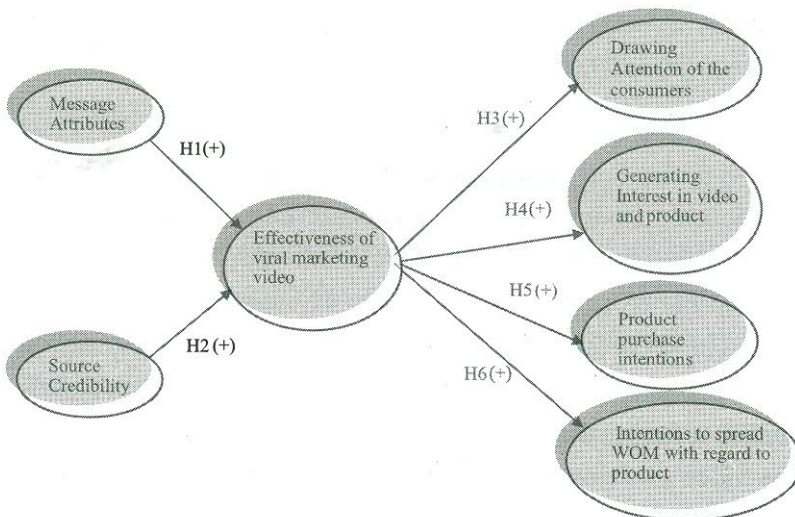
Based on intense review of past literature a questionnaire was designed which was pretested on the sample of 35 respondents, and hence was suitably revised. The revised questionnaire used for the collection of data was divided into two parts. First part contained 21 statements quantified on five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) that measured the effectiveness of message attributes and source credibility on consumers response process such as attention, interest, product purchase intentions and word-of mouth intentions for the advertised product. Second part of questionnaire included demographic profile of the respondents such as gender, age, education and occupation.

With the view to empirically investigate the effectiveness of viral marketing video, a three-stage analytic process was applied. Firstly, exploratory factor analysis was applied to refine the scales. For this purpose SPSS version 18.0 was used. Secondly, scales that were obtained as a result of the first-stage analysis were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS, 18.0. Finally, path analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique for testing the proposed hypotheses.

### HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on review of literature related to Viral Marketing videos and the consumer response process, a model has been proposed. This conceptual model, as shown in figure1 measures the effectiveness of viral marketing video and two variables that affect its effectiveness.

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model



By considering this proposed model, the following hypotheses were framed that acted as foundation for further study:

**H1: Message attributes** have significant influence on effectiveness of viral marketing video.

**H2: Source Credibility (Company as sender of message)** has significant influence on effectiveness of viral marketing video.

**H3: Viral Marketing video** has significant effect on drawing the **attention of the respondents**.

**H4: Viral Marketing video** has significant effect in **generating interests of the respondents in video and product**.

**H5: Viral Marketing video** has significant effect on respondents' **product purchase intentions**.

**H6: Viral Marketing video** has significant effect on respondents' **intentions to spread word-of-mouth with regard to product/brand advertised**.

## ANALYTICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Exploratory Analysis:

The multivariate statistical technique of Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to condense the information contained in a number of original variables into smaller set of composite dimensions with minimum loss of information (Hair et al., 1995). To proceed, first the reliability of the instrument was determined by using Cronbach's alpha that was found to be greater than 0.7 (i.e. 0.878) which is the commonly accepted threshold (Nunnally and Berstein, 1994), hence laying the foundation for further analysis.

The value of KMO "measure for sample adequacy" was found to be 0.811 that is greater than 0.5, which signifies fairly adequate sample. Bartlett's test of sphericity indicates strength of relationship among variables. The observed significance level was 0.000. Hence, it was confirmed that the strength of the relationship among variables is strong. By considering all the parameters, the data was adjudged as suitable to proceed for Factor Analysis. The set of 21 variables were then subjected to factor extraction using principal component method. The objective of using this method was to determine the minimum number of factors that accounts for maximum variance in the data. Based on Kaiser's eigen value criterion, six factors with Eigen value greater than one were

extracted using the Latent root criterion and varimax rotation. The index for present solution accounts for 77.134 of the total variance. It is pretty good figure as we lost only 22.866% of the information content in our study. These six factors corresponded exactly to one of the theoretically derived categories. All the items for the constructs of message attributes, source credibility, attention to viral marketing video, generation of interest in video, product purchase intentions and intentions to spread word-of-mouth were hence retained for the purpose of confirmatory factor analysis.

### **Confirmatory Analysis**

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the scales involving the measures that were retained for analysis after exploratory analysis. The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted by using AMOS. For the assessment of the model, multiple fit indexes are reported. The traditional chi-square is reported along with chi square/ degree of freedom i.e. 1.468, which is less than cut off point 5.00 as suggested by Hoyle (1995). The values of Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker- Lewis Index (TLI) and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) were 0.963, 0.955, 0.964 respectively, which were greater than the recommended value of good fit i.e. 0.9. (Hoyle, 1995; Fadlelmula, 2011). The value of Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.056, which is less than 0.10, indicating that the model was good fit with data (Fadlelmula, 2011). Moreover, the value of Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) 0.019 below 0.05, the guideline of acceptability indicates a good fit of the model to data (Fadlelmula, 2011). In assessment of the validity of measures, factor loadings of 0.60 are considered the minimum acceptable values and those items have lower values than this limit are likely candidates for deletion (Malhotra and Dash, 2010; Bansal and Voyer, 2000). One variable (w2) for the construct "word of mouth intentions" exhibited low factor loading so that variable was deleted from the scale to improve model fitness. The values of model fit given above were also calculated after deleting this variable to improve the fitness of the model.

### **Reliability and Validity Analysis of Measurement Scales:**

For the scales reliability analysis, cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were calculated for all the latent variables' measurement scales. In addition to this, construct validity of the scales was assessed by considering two types of criteria: convergent and discriminant validity.

**Table1: Reliability and Validity Analysis**

| Latent Variable                                       | Cronbach alpha | Composite Reliability | AVE   | MSV   | ASV   |
|---|----------------|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Message Attributes                                    | 0.856          | 0.879                 | 0.653 | 0.437 | 0.225 |
| Source Credibility                                    | 0.876          | 0.892                 | 0.808 | 0.044 | 0.010 |
| Attention   | 0.905          | 0.893                 | 0.680 | 0.192 | 0.081 |
| Interest in viral video and product                   | 0.783          | 0.788                 | 0.555 | 0.437 | 0.166 |
| Product Purchase intentions                           | 0.877          | 0.883                 | 0.715 | 0.205 | 0.132 |
| Word-of-mouth intentions with regard to product/brand | 0.876          | 0.896                 | 0.688 | 0.292 | 0.110 |

NOTE: (AVE: Average variance extracted; MSV: Maximum-shared variance; ASV: Average shared variance)

Table 1 depicts the value of Cronbach's alpha for each construct and this was found to be greater than 0.7, which is the commonly accepted threshold (Nunnally and Berstein, 1994). Moreover, all the composite reliabilities of the constructs were above 0.70 that is the common accepted level (Malhotra and Dash, 2010). In addition, we used AVE and composite reliability to assess convergent validity of the scales. Therefore, AVE of all the constructs is calculated and AVE of all constructs reached 0.50, the recommended cut-off criterion. Besides this to assess the construct validity of the scale, composite reliability of each construct should be more than its AVE. Both of these results are satisfactory as shown in table 1.

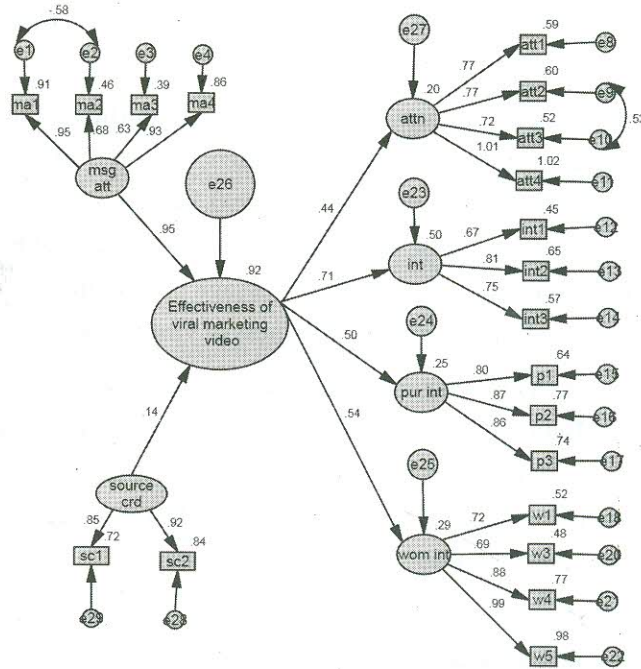
On the other hand, discriminant validity verifies that a construct is significantly distinct from other constructs and thus makes a unique contribution (Malhotra and Dash, 2010). In order for ensuring the discriminant validity of the scales, the two conditions must be fulfilled i.e.  $MSV < AVE$  and  $ASV < AVE$  ([www.statwiki.com](http://www.statwiki.com)) and both of these conditions are satisfied as depicted in table 1. It indicates that each construct is significantly distinct from the other constructs.



**Structural Model: Path Analysis**

In order to test the proposed hypotheses we developed a structural equation model that can be seen in figure 2. Hypothesized paths in the model were tested using AMOS, with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation. Overall fit of the model and the significance of the paths were considered for the model.

**Figure 2. Structural Equation Model**



**NOTE.** (Msg: Messge attributes; **Source crd:** source credibility; **Attn:** Drawing attention of the consumers; **Int:** Generating interest in viral video and product; **Pur int:** Product purchase intentions; **WOM int:** intentions to spread word-of-mouth with regard to product / brand advertised)

After conducting path analysis, the overall fit measures were analysed to know how the path model fits the data. Analysis of path model (CMIN/DF=1.554, CFI=0.954, IFI=0.955, TLI=0.946, RMR=0.02, RMSEA=0.06) yielded good fit to the data. The value of CMIN/DF is less than cut off point 5.00 as suggested by Hoyle (1995). The values of CFI, IFI and TLI were above 0.90, the required cut-off criterion (Fadlelmula, 2011; Hoyle, 1995). Additionally, the RMR is below the 0.05 guideline of acceptability and the value of RMSEA is less than 0.10 that indicates a good fit to the data (Fadlelmula, 2011).

According to the results as discussed above, all the important indicators of the model fit are in acceptable range. For this reason, this model is considered as an acceptable one.

The model shown in figure 2 indicates the path loadings (beta values) for each path. Hence the significant relationships that emerged from the final model are:

- “Message attributes” has significant influence on the effectiveness of viral marketing video (Beta value=0.95,  $p < 0.001$ ) and here  $p$  value denotes 0.001 level of significance. In this case, the value of  $R^2$  is 0.90, which indicates that the 90% of the variance in 'effectiveness of viral marketing video' is explained by the independent variable “message attributes”
- The hypothesis 2 was supported at 0.10 level of significance indicating that the “source credibility” has significant influence on the effectiveness of viral marketing video (Beta value=0.14,  $p < 0.1$ ). However, the determined relationship was found to be extremely weak as the value of  $R^2$  is 0.019, which shows that the company as sender of message contributes significantly less in terms of explained variance in effectiveness of viral marketing video.
- Viral marketing video has significant effect on drawing the attention of the respondents (Beta value=0.44,  $p < 0.001$ ) and this hypothesis is found significant at 0.001 level. In this case, the value of  $R^2$  is 0.19 which indicates that 19% of variance occurring in the variable 'attention of the respondents' being explained by the independent variable “viral marketing video”.
- Viral marketing video has significant effect in generating interests of the respondents in video and product (Beta value =0.71,  $p < 0.001$ ) and the support of this hypothesis was found at 0.001 level of significance. In this case, the value of  $R^2$  is 0.50 hence explaining 50% of variance in the variable 'generation of interest' by the independent variable “Viral marketing video”.
- Viral marketing video has significant effect on respondents' product purchase intentions (Beta value =0.50,  $p < 0.001$ ). In this case, the value of  $R^2$  is 0.25 indicating 20% of the variance occurring in the variable 'product purchase intentions' as explained by the independent variable “Viral marketing video”.
- Viral marketing video has significant effect on respondents' intention to spread word-of-mouth with regard to product/brand being advertised (Beta value=0.54,  $p < 0.001$ ). In this case, the value of  $R^2$  is 0.29, which indicates that the 29% of the variance in customer's intentions to spread word-of-mouth is explained by the independent variable.

The above analysis reveals that though both the constructs (message attributes and company as sender of message) affect the effectiveness of viral marketing video but “message attributes” finally emerged as major contributor ( $R^2=90\%$ ) in influencing the effectiveness of viral marketing video. As the source credibility only explains 2% variance in the construct “effectiveness of viral marketing video”, which signifies that the company as sender of video is not considered as a credible source by the respondents. Further, it was revealed that viral marketing video has significant effect on all its dimensions but it explains the maximum variance in the factor “generation of interest” of the respondents, here  $R^2$  is 0.50.

It is evident from the above analysis that “attributes of the message” only generates an interest in the respondents for the products being advertised but it does not much affect the purchase and word-of-mouth intentions of the respondents. On the other hand, the respondents consider company as sender of message as a less credible source. However, if the message sender is a peer group or in a close relation to a person then it may affect the purchase and WOM intentions of the respondents. This is in accordance with the previous research studies, which have also proved that the company as a sender of the message can contribute but may also decrease the message's potential effect on intentions or attitude change of the consumers.

## CONCLUSION

With the emergence of internet technology, viral marketing has become an effective tool for the marketers as it encourages consumers to take action as a result of the message and pass along that message to others (Dobele et al., 2007). In the present scenario, peer-to-peer communication is considered as a credible source that influence purchase decisions of the consumers. In addition to this, past studies have also revealed that message attributes and relationship of the receiver with the sender influence the attitude and intentions of the consumers for purchasing the product and spreading word-of-mouth.

In the present study, exploratory factor analysis technique applied to explore the factors, revealed the factors, which were similar to theoretically derived factors. These were message attributes, source credibility, drawing attention of the consumers, generating interest in the viral video and product, product purchase intentions and intentions to spread word-of-mouth. These explored factors were then confirmed by applying confirmatory factor analysis and fit indexes of the model ensured the “goodness of fit” of the proposed model.

The causal relationship among the constructs was analysed using structural equation modeling technique. The results of the path analysis revealed that “message attributes” and “company as sender of message” have significant influence on the effectiveness of viral marketing video. The influence of “company as sender of message” was significantly less as compared to the construct “message attributes”. This may be attributed to the fact that the credibility of the company as source of message is perceived to be less significant by the consumers as they do not resort enough confidence to propagate positive word-of-mouth for company-generated messages. Thus it can be said that it is the strength of message attributes which makes the viral marketing video deemed to be effective and hence viral.

On the other hand, viral marketing video has significant effect on drawing attention of the consumers, generating interest in the product, product purchase intentions and intentions to spread word-of-mouth. However, it does not affect the other factors much as in comparison to the factor “the generation of interest”. This reveals that the content of the message (message attributes) makes the viral video effective in such a way that it generates interest of the respondents in the product. But while taking the purchase decisions and to spread positive word-of-mouth for the advertised products the consumers needs to believe the source credibility and which is not perceived so if company itself is the source/sender. However if the sender of the message has close relation with the receiver then the purchase decisions of the consumers and decisions to spread word-of-mouth will be effected positively.

In a nutshell, it can be said that message attributes being the independent variable have real strength to influence the effectiveness of viral marketing video. However, in order to achieve desired effectiveness of viral videos, the organisations need to identify individuals with high social networking potential who will act as message disseminators so as to increase the credibility of the message and hence obtain positive word-of-mouth for the products/ brand being advertised.

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Statement about ownership and other particulars about newspaper entitled  
'Business Analyst', Delhi, as required to be published.

FORM IV (See Rule 8)

1. Place of publication : Shri Ram college of Commerce,  
University of Delhi, Maurice Nagar,  
Delhi - 110007
2. Periodicity of publication : Twice a year : April-September,  
October-March
3. Publisher's name : Mr. Mohinder Kansal  
Whether citizen of India : Yes  
Address : Shri Ram College of Commerce
4. Editor's name : Dr. C. S. Sharma  
Whether citizen of India : Yes  
Address : Shri Ram College of Commerce
5. Name and address of : Shri Ram College of Commerce  
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