



## Advertisements on Facebook: Identifying the persuasive elements in the development of positive attitudes in consumers



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### ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to develop the scale items of consumers' attitudes toward Facebook advertisements and to theorize consumers' attitudinal behaviour. To undertake this study, a research assistant was appointed, who is also an active member of Facebook, to introduce a message about the product Samsung Tab S, and to pass it to other members of their network. From this experiment, different members of their network participated in generating, passing, and receiving messages to develop a preliminary structured perception which was converted to generate scale items to measure attitude. Then an independent empirical study was conducted among members of a social network to verify and validate these scale items and their underlying constructs. From the findings in this study, it is identified that attitudes toward social network advertisement, i.e., any effort to communicate messages about products among network members, who are also consumers of different products, is formed and persuaded by hedonic motivation (HM), source derogation (SD), self-concept (SC), message informality (MI), and experiential messages (EM).

### 1. Introduction

Trying to communicate with consumers through social media is very common nowadays. Several researchers (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Kapoor et al., 2017; Shareef et al., 2017a) have attempted to understand the effectiveness of social media marketing or viral marketing. In social media, members try to communicate with or circulate personal opinion and experience about any products among their peers through their network loop. This mass communication can enhance product acceptability and create group opinion. Researchers, nowadays, termed this informal promotional function as viral marketing, i.e., social media advertisement (Chu, 2011; Shareef et al., 2017a). This research has conceptualized viral marketing or social media advertisement as the non-commercial proactive product promotion among peers through any Internet based social media network (Hayes and King, 2014).

Several researchers (Dwivedi et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Kapoor et al., 2016) have explored consumers' behavioural attitudes toward viral marketing; however, they used only several technology adoption models as a theoretical framework. To identify and theorize consumers'

behaviour for viral marketing, a comprehensive framework is of utmost importance which essentially should include technology adoption behaviour, marketing aspects, cognitive decision-making process, and psychological behaviour. Therefore, the objective of this study is to develop the scale items of consumers' attitudes toward viral marketing or social media advertisements and to theorize consumers' attitudinal behaviour through a comprehensive theoretical framework. More precisely, this current research is engaged in deriving the driving forces which persuade Facebook members, who are also prospective consumers, to develop favourable attitudes toward any product. So, although the findings of this study are to reveal the critical factors which shape consumers' attitudes toward viral marketing, it also leads to an understanding of the effectiveness of viral marketing through measuring consumers' attitudes about social media advertising.

Behavioural learning theory (Bloch and Marsha, 1983; Ertmer and Newby, 1993; Nord and Peter, 1980) postulates that consumers vigorously attempt to learn from external events. As such, marketers generate advertisements to transfer their intended meaning to the prospective consumers about product promotion so that consumers will

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learn about the competitive advantage of the product and will be influenced to grow behavioural intention. Under this context, consumers' learning capability, scope, and habits are substantially governed by the marketers' competence to communicate with the consumers with effective advertising (Chu, 2011; Ducoffe, 1995; Schulze et al., 2014; Shareef et al., 2015). Another concept of consumers' behavioural capability which is explained by cognitive learning theory (Nicosia, 1966) recommends that any intended significance of the advertisement might be not accepted by the consumers. It reflects that, while generating any product promotional advertisement, marketers may have an intention to transfer a certain concept about the product to the customers, but there is always a possibility that consumers may interpret it quite differently. Consumers may be tempted to conceive the implied meaning of any advertisement completely from a different perspective which may be subversive to the image of the product (Greenwald, 1968; Nicosia, 1966; Shareef et al., 2017b). Therefore, understanding consumers' mental ability, pattern, scope, and way of thinking is a potential tool for the marketers to develop and implement any product promotional activities. Marketers have attempted to propagate consumers' exposure, attention, and positive perception about an advertisement for intended meaning, but understanding consumers' psychological traits is a fertile area to cultivate in this context (Logan et al., 2012; Pelling and White, 2009; Shareef et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2011).

After receiving a product promotional message like an advertisement, consumers' response to this can be varied. Consumer response models (Greenwald, 1968; Nicosia, 1966), outline that customers may not be interested in exposure, or pay attention, and thus, may not learn from the advertisement. Another response can be characterized by exposure, attention, and learning from the intended messages from marketers, but they may not be persuaded and could actually have an entirely negative exposure perspective. Alternatively, some consumers will be willing to be exposed, attentive, and learn from the implied meaning. And thus, will be persuaded.

This variation in behavioural pattern has long been investigated by many marketing researchers (Kim and Ko, 2012; Logan et al., 2012; Pelling and White, 2009; Shareef et al., 2016a, 2016b); however, for recent viral marketing, i.e., social media advertisement, consumers' perceptions—their cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes are developed in quite different ways (Logan et al., 2012; Pietro and Pantano, 2012; Schulze et al., 2014). The scholarly articles of viral marketing or social media advertisement quite firmly acknowledged that, due to differences in emotional affiliation, patterns of interaction, social group formation, generating, sending, passing-on, and receiving of messages, and ways of thinking from a cognitive perspective — social network marketing through advertisement is substantially different from traditional advertisement in terms of consumers' exposure, attention, and persuasion. In social networks like Facebook, active members of any network loop, either professional or informal, are typically engaged in sharing their views, generating any new message, passing-on any opinion to other members of this loop, and seeking opinions which can be persuasive (Hayes and King, 2014). However, this internal brainstorming type of communication occurs in a non-commercial way which gives the impression of informal communication. This informal information sharing fundamentally develops and diffuses higher credibility as the authentication of the message (Akar and Topcu, 2011; Chu, 2011; Hayes and King, 2014; Kim and Ko, 2012). Members of Facebook joining in a specific loop of friends and colleagues also share their views about any product from their personal experience which can be deemed to be non-commercial and real. Therefore, there is an explicit research gap in understanding how consumers develop and pursue their favourable attitude toward viral marketing. However, in social media, the information generation by any members of a network starts up a new avenue for the prospective consumers, who are basically members of that loop, to get different opinions which ultimately act as the primary source of information for them to create attitudes toward the product and ultimately, to buy (Kim

and Ko, 2012; Logan et al., 2012). Investigating and conceptualizing the measuring items which are responsible for consumers' attitudinal development in viral marketing has potential importance both for practitioners and academics. The findings of this research will certainly contribute in understanding consumers' behaviour for social media marketing or viral marketing which is significantly different from traditional views.

The next section describes the research design of this exploratory study which includes methodology and data collection procedures. Then, the statistical analysis section is illustrated, followed by the results and discussion section. Theory development and managerial implications are explained in the following section. Conclusions and future research concepts including the limitations of this study are finally presented.

## 2. Theoretical background

Shedding light on the research outcome of several scholarly articles working on consumers attitude toward viral marketing (Chu, 2011; Kim and Ko, 2012; Logan et al., 2012; Pietro and Pantano, 2012; Schulze et al., 2014), it is explicitly recognized that members of any social network of a particular loop are very interested in gaining peers' opinions about any product from their consumption experience.

### 2.1. Distinctiveness of viral marketing

However, in this aspect, these members are not eager to receive any commercial views from their private network; rather they give much more priority to informal information which is created completely non-commercially by their informal peers (Kim and Ko, 2012; Logan et al., 2012). Therefore, promotional marketing or any advertisement in Facebook created by either informal members of the network or injected by marketers, has significant differences from traditional Internet based marketing in creating exposure, attention, and attitude for persuasion. For marketers promoting products or services through Facebook, it has the potential to urge and stimulate consumers' behaviour to instigate their positive attitude towards the advertisement, then learn and be persuaded.

### 2.2. Theoretical base of existing literature

To date, all the potential research studies working on identifying consumers' attitudes towards viral marketing in social networks have attempted to formalize consumers attitudes for adoption from the basis of the traditional behavioural models like the technology adoption model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), diffusion of innovation (DOI) theory (Rogers, 1995), unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986), and the motivational model (MM) (Vallerand, 1997) etc.

### 2.3. Consumer behaviour for social media members

However, Hayes and King (2014) used social exchange theory (Homans, 1958) to understand expected value in any exchange between parties for information giving and seeking. Members of social network exchange information for a particular reason (Hayes and King, 2014; Ho and Dempsey, 2010), and this exchange, as per research, should be informal. Several researchers (Chu, 2011; Kim and Ko, 2012; Shareef et al., 2017a) argued that consumers' perception, attitude, and behaviour as members of social network have substantially different patterns while giving, passing, and seeking product information. So, in the context of social network advertisement, formation of consumers' behaviour and functions of attitude should be investigated as an exploratory study, so as to enable marketers to formulate social promotional marketing, thereby modeling consumers' new behaviour of

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