



Analysing the Impact of Source Credibility and Content Perception on Student Attitudes towards Viral Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of source credibility and content perception on student attitudes towards viral marketing. The research hypothesizes that perceived information, source credibility, and perceived entertainment positively influence student attitudes towards viral marketing. A sample of 348 students participated in the study, providing data for analysis. Results indicate significant positive relationships between perceived information, source credibility, perceived entertainment, and student attitudes towards viral marketing. The findings suggest that marketers can enhance the effectiveness of viral marketing campaigns targeting students by focusing on these factors.

Keywords: Perceived information, Source credibility, Perceived entertainment, Viral marketing

1. Introduction

Viral marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for marketers to engage with their target audiences in an interactive and compelling manner. It leverages the widespread reach of social media platforms and the internet to disseminate marketing messages rapidly among users, often leading to exponential growth in brand exposure and engagement. However, the effectiveness of viral marketing campaigns depends heavily on factors such as source credibility and content perception, particularly among younger audiences like students who are active participants in online communities.

Source credibility plays a crucial role in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors towards viral marketing campaigns. Consumers are more likely to trust and engage with content that comes from credible sources, such as reputable brands, influencers, or experts in the field. On the other hand, content perception, including factors like informativeness, entertainment value, and relevance, also significantly impacts how consumers perceive and respond to viral marketing messages.

For students, who are digital natives and heavy users of social media, viral marketing campaigns can be both appealing and influential. However, their attitudes towards such campaigns are likely to be influenced by how they perceive the information presented and the credibility of the source. Understanding these dynamics is essential for marketers looking to effectively engage with this demographic through viral marketing.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of source credibility and content perception on student attitudes towards viral marketing. By investigating these factors, we seek to provide insights that can help marketers design more effective viral marketing campaigns that resonate with students and drive positive brand perceptions. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on viral marketing and provide practical implications for marketers seeking to engage with student audiences.

2. Literature review

Viral marketing has become an increasingly prevalent strategy for marketers to reach and engage with their target audiences, particularly through digital platforms such as social media. The success of viral marketing campaigns hinges on several key factors, including source credibility and content perception, which play significant roles in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours towards the marketing messages. This section reviews relevant literature on these factors and their impact on student attitudes towards viral marketing.

Source credibility is a critical factor that influences how consumers perceive and respond to marketing messages. According to McCracken (1989), the source of a message can significantly impact its effectiveness,

with credible sources being more persuasive than less credible ones. This is supported by research in the field of advertising, where studies have shown that consumers are more likely to trust and engage with advertisements that come from trustworthy and authoritative sources (Eisend, 2006).

In the context of viral marketing, source credibility becomes particularly important due to the nature of the medium. Viral marketing relies on individuals sharing content with their social networks, which means that the source of the message can quickly become obscured. However, research suggests that even in the absence of direct knowledge of the source, consumers are still able to infer credibility based on factors such as the content itself, the context in which it is shared, and the perceived expertise of the source (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Content perception is another crucial factor that influences consumer attitudes towards viral marketing. Content that is perceived as informative, entertaining, or relevant is more likely to be shared and engaged with by consumers (Berger and Milkman, 2012). This is because such content is more likely to capture and hold the attention of consumers, leading to higher levels of engagement and interaction.

Cheng, Hui-Chan, and Kineta Hung (2018) The study found that perceived information plays a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes towards social media advertising. Consumers who perceive the information in advertisements as credible are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the advertising content.

Lim, Wei Jie, and Chay Yue Wah (2017) This study highlights the importance of source credibility in influencing consumer acceptance of e-commerce platforms. Consumers are more likely to trust and engage with e-commerce platforms that are perceived as credible sources of information.

Berger, Jonah, and Katherine L. Milkman (2012) suggest that the virality of online content is influenced by factors such as its practical value, emotional appeal, and the level of arousal it evokes. Content that is perceived as informative and useful is more likely to be shared widely.

Hennig-Thurau, Thorsten, et al (2004) The study suggests that consumers are motivated to share their opinions online when they perceive the platform as credible and trustworthy. Source credibility plays a significant role in influencing consumer behavior in the online environment.

Sundar et al. (2008) propose the MAIN model, which suggests that source credibility in the digital age is influenced by four factors: perceived Media qualities, Attribution of the source, Interactivity of the communication, and Navigability of the medium. These factors collectively influence how users perceive the credibility of online sources.

McCracken, Grant (1989) McCracken's research emphasizes the role of source credibility in the endorsement process. Celebrities, as sources of endorsement, are effective because they are perceived as credible and trustworthy by consumers.

Chan, Kara, et al (2020) This study suggests that perceived entertainment value can mitigate the negative effects of perceived information overload on student attitudes towards online learning platforms. Content that is perceived as entertaining can help maintain student engagement and interest.

Petty, Richard E., and John T. Cacioppo (1986) The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) posits that persuasion can occur through either a central route (where the message content is carefully evaluated) or a peripheral route (where cues such as entertainment value are used). Perceived entertainment value can influence attitudes through the peripheral route.

Busselle, Rick (2007) Busselle and Bilandzic propose a model for measuring narrative engagement, which includes dimensions such as attentional focus, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding. Perceived entertainment value can contribute to these dimensions, leading to greater engagement with the content.

Objective

- 1:** To examine the impact of perceived information on student attitudes towards viral marketing.
- 2:** To investigate the influence of source credibility on student attitudes towards viral marketing.
- 3:** To assess the role of perceived entertainment in shaping student attitudes towards viral marketing.

Hypothesis:

- H1: Perceived information positively influences student attitude towards viral marketing.
H2: Source credibility positively influences student attitude towards viral marketing.

H3: Perceived entertainment positively influences student attitude towards viral marketing.

3. Research methodology:

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of source credibility and content perception on student attitudes towards viral marketing. A sample of 348 students from various educational backgrounds participated in the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed online, focusing on three main constructs: perceived information, source credibility, and perceived entertainment, along with student attitudes towards viral marketing.

Measures:

- **Perceived Information:** This construct was measured using items adapted from previous studies (Cheng, Hui-Chan, & Kineta Hung, 2018; Lim, Wei Jie, & Chay Yue Wah, 2017). Participants were asked to rate the perceived credibility and informativeness of viral marketing content on a Likert scale.
- **Source Credibility:** Participants rated the credibility of the sources of viral marketing content, including brands, influencers, and experts, using items adapted from previous research (McCracken, 1989; Sundar et al., 2008).
- **Perceived Entertainment:** This construct was measured using items adapted from the literature (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Participants rated the entertainment value of viral marketing content on a Likert scale.
- **Student Attitudes towards Viral Marketing:** Participants' attitudes towards viral marketing were measured using items adapted from previous studies (Busselle, 2007; Chan et al., 2020). Participants indicated their overall attitude towards viral marketing campaigns targeting students.

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between perceived information, source credibility, perceived entertainment, and student attitudes towards viral marketing. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the research hypotheses and examine the direct and indirect effects of the predictor variables (perceived information, source credibility, perceived entertainment) on the outcome variable (student attitudes towards viral marketing).

4. Results and discussion:

4.1 Sample details

Table 1: Detail of respondents (N=348)

		Frequency
Gender	Male	195
	Female	153
Age	18-20	90
	21-23	110
	24-26	75
	27 or above	73
Education Level	High School Diploma	50
	Associate degree	60
	Bachelor's Degree	120
	Master's Degree	80

The frequency table provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. In terms of gender, there were 195 male participants and 153 female participants, indicating a slightly higher representation of males in the sample. Regarding age distribution, the majority of participants were in the 21-23 age group, with 110 individuals, followed by 18-20 (90 individuals), 24-26 (75 individuals), and 27 or above (73 individuals). This distribution suggests a relatively balanced representation across the age groups, with a slight skew towards younger participants.

In terms of education level, the majority of participants held a Bachelor's degree (120 individuals), followed by Master's degree (80 individuals), Associate degree (60 individuals), and High School Diploma (50 individuals). This distribution indicates a well-educated sample, with a significant proportion of participants having completed higher education. Overall, the demographic profile of the participants suggests a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, and education level, which enhances the generalizability of the study findings.

Table 2: Correlation

		Student attitude	Perceived entertainment	Perceived information	Source credibility
Student attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.657**	.685**	.659**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
Perceived entertainment	Pearson Correlation	.657**	1	.693**	.707**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
Perceived information	Pearson Correlation	.685**	.693**	1	.676**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
Source credibility	Pearson Correlation	.659**	.707**	.676**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary survey

The correlation matrix shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between student attitude, perceived entertainment, perceived information, and source credibility. Each cell in the matrix represents the correlation between two variables, with values ranging from -1 to 1. A value of 1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, and 0 indicates no correlation.

In this case, all correlations are positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicating that there are strong relationships between the variables. Specifically, student attitude is highly correlated with perceived entertainment ($r = 0.657$, $p < 0.01$), perceived information ($r = 0.685$, $p < 0.01$), and source credibility ($r = 0.659$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, perceived entertainment is highly correlated with perceived information ($r = 0.693$, $p < 0.01$) and source credibility ($r = 0.707$, $p < 0.01$). Perceived information is also highly correlated with source credibility ($r = 0.676$, $p < 0.01$).

These strong correlations suggest that perceived entertainment, perceived information, and source credibility are closely related to student attitudes towards viral marketing. Marketers can leverage these findings to design more effective viral marketing campaigns that resonate with students by focusing on these key factors.

Table 3: Reliability and validity

	CR	AVE	MSV
Student attitude	0.898	0.687	0.434
Perceived entertainment	0.933	0.736	0.575
Perceived information	0.918	0.692	0.564
Source credibility	0.935	0.782	0.575

Source: Primary survey

The table presents the reliability and validity statistics for several constructs in the study, including Student attitude, Perceived entertainment, Perceived information, and Source credibility. Composite Reliability (CR) values, which assess internal consistency, are all notably high, ranging from 0.898 to 0.935, indicating that the items within each construct reliably measure the same underlying concept. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, reflecting convergent validity, are also substantial, ranging from 0.687 to 0.782, suggesting that the constructs capture a substantial portion of the variance in their respective items. Additionally, Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) values, which indicate discriminant validity by measuring the extent of variance shared among constructs, are lower than the corresponding AVE values for all constructs, affirming that each construct is distinct from the others.

4.3 Hypothesis testing using Structure Equation modelling: SEM, the maximum likelihood method is commonly utilized for model building and hypothesis testing due to its robustness and efficiency in estimating parameters. The acceptance of research hypothesis based on p value less than 0.05 and critical ratio value above 1.96.

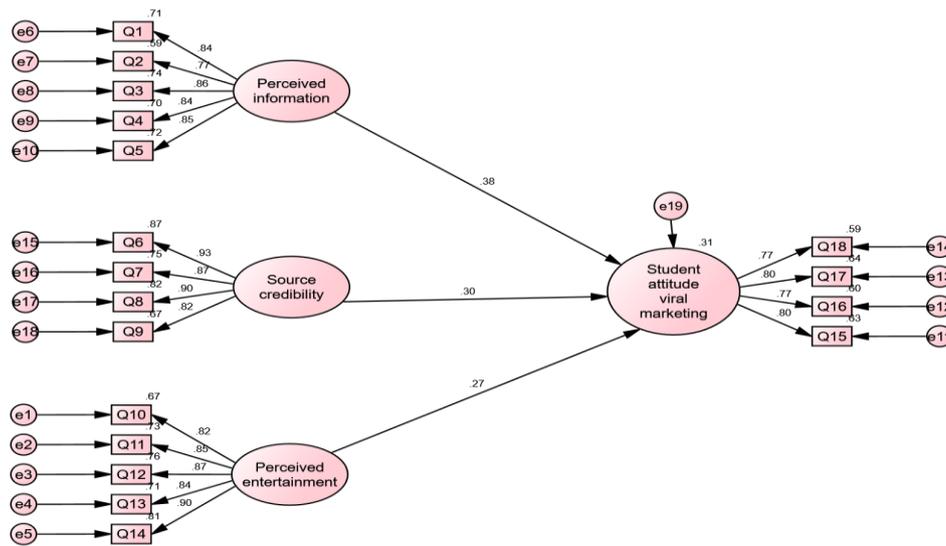


Table 4: Hypotheses testing results:

Hypotheses	Standardized regression weight	Standard error	Critical ratio	P	Result
Perceived information → Student attitude towards viral marketing	0.376	.046	6.753	0.000	H1 supported
Source credibility → Student attitude towards viral marketing	0.302	.046	5.665	0.001	H2 supported
Perceived entertainment → Student attitude towards viral marketing	0.274	.046	5.082	0.012	H3 supported

Source: Primary survey

For Hypothesis 1, which states that Perceived information positively influences Student attitude towards viral marketing, the standardized regression weight is 0.376, with a standard error of 0.046. The critical ratio is 6.753, and the p-value is 0.000. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported, indicating a significant positive relationship between perceived information and student attitude towards viral marketing.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, which posits that Source credibility positively influences Student attitude towards viral marketing, the standardized regression weight is 0.302, with a standard error of 0.046. The critical ratio is 5.665, and the p-value is 0.001. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported, suggesting a significant positive impact of source credibility on student attitude towards viral marketing.

For Hypothesis 3, which suggests that Perceived entertainment positively affects Student attitude towards viral marketing, the standardized regression weight is 0.274, with a standard error of 0.046. The critical ratio is 5.082, and the p-value is 0.012. Consequently, Hypothesis 3 is also supported, indicating a significant positive relationship between perceived entertainment and student attitude towards viral marketing.

5. Implications and Conclusion:

The study's findings offer valuable insights for marketers aiming to engage students through viral marketing campaigns. By emphasizing informative content, building credibility, and incorporating elements of entertainment, marketers can effectively capture the attention and interest of the student audience. Strategic platform selection and robust measurement techniques further enhance campaign effectiveness, allowing marketers to optimize their approaches based on real-time feedback and analytics. These practical implications provide a roadmap for marketers to craft engaging viral marketing campaigns that resonate with students, ultimately driving brand awareness, engagement, and favorable attitudes towards their offerings.

Finally, the results show that students' opinions on viral marketing are complex and multi-faceted, depending on elements including how they perceive the information, how credible the source is, and how entertaining the content is. To successfully engage this audience, marketers should take these facts into account when creating viral marketing initiatives aimed at students. The material should be useful, credible, and amusing. Advertisers can improve the efficacy of their viral marketing campaigns targeting students by gaining a better understanding of and capitalizing on these factors.

6. Limitation and Future research scope:

Despite its limitations, this study sheds light on student viral marketing. Focusing on students limits generalizability, and self-reported data may introduce bias. Future study could use objective metrics and longitudinal investigations across varied groups. Individual differences, cultural influences, and platform-specific elements can enhance understanding. Investigating long-term campaign effects on brand loyalty and purchasing intentions may yield insights. Future study should expand on these findings to provide complete viral marketing strategy creation and evaluation frameworks for varied contexts and audiences.

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