Factors Affecting the Success of Viral Marketing

An Affective – Cognitive- Behavioral Process

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Abstract

Viral marketing is an inexpensive method which has a tremendous impact on consumer purchasing behavior. However, literature about the cognitive, affective, and behavior of people that constitute the essential components of any such strategy is rare. This conceptual paper develops a cognitive-affective-behaviour model of viral marketing via the integration of tie strength, perceptual affinity, emotions. The goal of this paper is to investigate factors affecting to the success of viral advertising. The research implies that tie strength, perceptual affinity, emotions have strong effects on the success of viral advertising. These elements have their own impact on different stages of viral advertising to provide marketers a strong tool with which to develop a great viral campaign.

Keywords: Viral advertising, Cognitive-affective-behavior process, Tie strength, Perceptual affinity and emotions

1. Introduction

The Internet advertising market, over the past few years, has gained an important position by providing more useful tools for marketers to influence their target customer than the traditional advertising like TV, radio, or print ads (Tran, 2014). One of the most challenging social media problems that marketers need to face is media advertisings are easily eliminated to being shown by consumers. To be successful in reaching target consumers in a great volume, marketers need to discover a way of reaching their customers without them knowing it is a method of advertising (Curran, K. , Graham. S., Temple, C., 2011).To deal with that, an advertising campaign needs to include innovative contents like surprise, entertainment, especially trustworthy messages which these advertising activities are called viral marketing.

According to Wolpponen et al. (2006), Viral marketing can be considered as part of internet word of mouth when the opinion leader shares a message with the group. Ferguson states that "successful viral marketing strategies will merge with loyalty marketing efforts to capture and identify prospects at the top of the funnel and build advocacy with high-value segments" (2008). In addition, viral advertising is believed to bring three main advantages for a company (Dobele, Toleman & Beverland, 2005). First, the expenditure is much less expensive than other media such as TV or newspaper. The second reason is it is more persuasive and the last one is it provides a more effective targeting method. Therefore, it is absolutely vital to study how to build a successful viral marketing campaign.

However, viral marketing's constraint is being an unsolicited process, receiving viral advertising from another person can be considered as spam, virus or advertising clutter (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Hence, marketers have to analyze an effective way to eliminate clutter on the internet. To deal with this problem, this paper will introduce an Effective consumer making decision model to investigate which elements impacts on different stages of the effective consumer decision making process of forwarding viral advertising, thus providing a success viral marketing strategy. The present study proposes the effective- cognitive-behavioral model to explain the relationship among perceptual, tie strength, and emotion that, in turn, influence the success of viral marketing content. This conceptual paper will bring apply and provide professional knowledge to design effective viral advertising campaigns. Effective, cognitive and behavioral process are addressed as the three aspects of Effective consumer decision making process to build the

theory and propositions concerning the means by which tie strength facilitates cognitive, perceptual affinity. These generate effective emotions which influence consumer behavior.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

2.1 Viral advertising: effective consumer decision making process (effective-cognitive-behavior)

The firms' usage of online advertising is growing at phenomenal rates (Riasi & Pourmiri,2015). Online advertising can help the companies to succeed in customer acquisition and to improve their competitiveness (Amiri Aghdaie et al, 2012; Riasi and Amiri Aghdaie, 2013; Riasi, 2015a). Viral advertising relies heavily on online marketing strategies and can help the companies to become more competitive in the market; this strategy is extremely beneficial for the companies in financial services industry (Riasi, 2015b) and tourism industry (Riasi and Pourmiri, 2016). Along with the emergence of the Internet, electronic word of mouth has become an important influence on consumers' product evaluation. Viral Marketing refers as the process by which a brand can gain new consumers by encouraging 'honest' communication. Prospective customers tend to search for more information before entering the behavioral phase (Doh & Hwang, 2009). Peer to peer communication in Internet viral marketing is totally valuable to information of networking, enhancing audiences' beliefs, and eventually leading to the final buying decision (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). According to Bruyn, tie strength and consumer perceptual play main roles in impacting the effectiveness of viral advertising. Furthermore, emotion is a critical feature in shaping how people process ads, including viral video ads through behavioral intentions (Ecklor & Bolls, 2011). Sutheerawong and Siripiyavatana (2014) stated that before making a buying decision, consumers are involved in the cognitive phase after being engaged in the affective phase of emotion. Prior research, however, has largely ignored how cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of viral marketing work together toward enhancing internet word of mouth message effectiveness. Cognitive is the thinking of the consumers; affective is the feeling of the consumers, while behavioral is the action that is taken by the consumers.

Sutheerawong and Siripiyavatana have stated that effective consumer decision making process followed by 'feel-learn-do' model is the most suitable for their prankvertising research. As prankvertising is a phenomenon of viral marketing (Roth, 2013), the particular viral marketing will be applied to the Affective consumer category, regardless of the product or service type. Moreover, in this paper we will stretch out the three most important factors that impact the success of viral advertising. The tie strength, and perceptual affinity are significant elements of word of mouth influence (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Furthermore, emotions play a key role in driving viral marketing campaigns (Tran, 2014). Specifically, perceptual affinity especially generates recipient's interest as an effective aspect, tie strength facilitates cognitive (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008) and emotions are related to forwarding behavior (Ecklor & Bolls, 2011). Those elements provide marketers with more important information in designing a way which would have an effect when it comes to deciding what the target is and how it would react to certain things. Hence, tie strength, perceptual affinity and emotions are the three main factors analyzed for the effectiveness of viral advertising of this paper. Different factors have an effect on different specific stages of the multistage model. Therefore, we propose the adapted Foote, Cone and Belding grid (Ratchford, 1987) and Tran model (2014) applied to viral marketing phenomenon. Figure 1 below, showing the Affective consumer category is the target for the viral marketing phenomenon. I will go in detail of this model to bring about a better understanding of how these elements affect the success of viral advertising to explain the hypotheses, I will go into detail of this model.
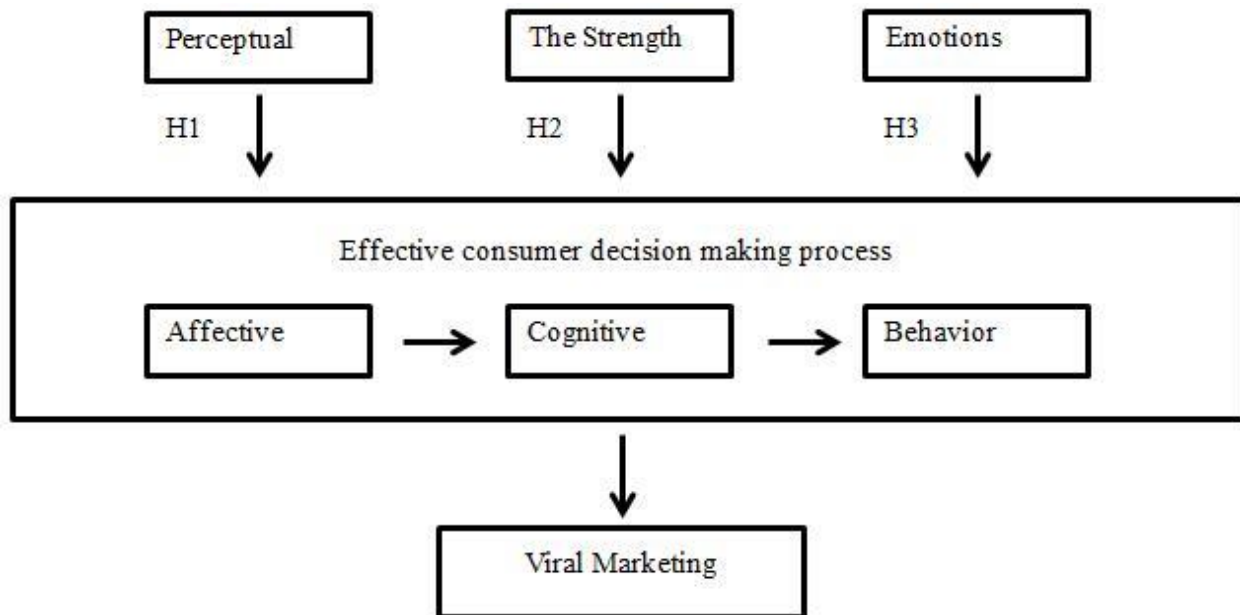
Model 1. Conceptual framework adapted from Tran (2014) and Ratchford (1987)

Moreover, this paper also sheds light on the strategy to solve an unsolicited process of viral marketing since receiving viral advertising from a strange person that can be considered as spam, virus or advertising clutter (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Hence, marketers have to analyze an effective way to eliminate the clutter. To deal with this problem, Sutheerawong and Siripiyavatana(2014) have analyzed that effective consumer decision making follows "learn-feel-do" in viral marketing. The effective consumer decision making process is applied to study the effects of unsolicited, electronic referrals of viral marketing: effective-cognitive-behavior.

2.2 Perceptual Affinity

Viral marketing, which involves emotional content, as such quadrants, is fostered by 'feel' (Sutheerawong and Siripiyavatana, 2014). These groups of 'feelers' and 'reactors' will prioritize their decision making process on feeling before learning, and tend to base their buying decision upon their feeling emotion. Perceptual affinity is defined as the similarities in values, likes, dislikes and experience between two or more people (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Perceptual homophile, which is an important antecedent of word of mouth influence, refers about how people's believes and impressions are appropriate or go hand-in-hand (Chu & Kim, 2011). It correlates with how people understand homogeneity by Liu-Thompkins (2012) counted by the degree of shared interest among seed consumers. It is also likely to happen in an online environment (Liu-Thompkins, 2012). Perceptual elements such as attitudes and beliefs can make it easier to give information to people when it comes to studying those (Chu & Kim, 2011). Thus, perceptual affinity plays a critical impact on the cognitive and effective aspect of the effective consumer decision making process. Hence, hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Perceptual affinity has a positive effect on consumers' effective aspect.

2.3 Tie strength

Social network analysis is a data analysis technique founded on the principle of structuralism, where the pattern of relationships, among people, itself is presumed to have psychological impacts beyond individual differences or the nature of the relationships themselves. Those cognitive, affective, or behavioral bonds linking dyads in some manner such as friendship, form the network's structure, much like in chemistry, where the structure of bonds among elements forms compounds.

Before making a buying decision, consumers can involve in a cognitive phase after being engaged in the affective phase of emotion (Sutheerawong and Siripiyavatana, 2014). Cognitive responses include greater brand awareness (Ferguson 2008; Liu 2006; Sheth 1971). The diffusion speed of information can be significantly increased during the cognitive phase, hence, leading to the success of viral advertising. It is rather imperative when it comes to choosing consumers who would be the ones with the ability to spread information and build networks (Dobele, Adam, Michael,

Joële, & Robert, 2007). Granovetter defined the strength of an interpersonal tie as a "combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie" (Granovettor, 1973). He also distinguished two types of tie: strong and weak. Strong ties are the people you find trustworthy, people whose social circles are tightly related with your own (Gilbert & Karrie, 2009), for instance friends and family. Conversely, people in the weak ties group are often among weaker and less personal social relationships with the user than the strong one (Pigg & Laura, 2004).

Strong ties are more credible and trustworthy than weak ties (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Previous research has shown that strong ties are more likely to be activated for information flow than weak ties (Reingen & Kernan, 1986; Brown & Reingen, 1987). Moreover, the amount of word of mounth communication generated is generally higher within groups with strong tie relations than within groups with weak tie relations (Bone, 1992). Opening an email from the strangers (weak ties) is considered far more risky than an email from family members or friends (strong ties) (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Receiving email from the strong ties gives recipients more chance of getting valuable information than the weak ones (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). What is more, the information communicated by strong ties is more influential and, therefore, likely to have a bigger influence on the recipients. Consequently, based on the advantages mentioned above, strong ties give marketers more opportunities to generate Internet users 'Cognitive than weak ties. Consequently, hypothesis is concluded:

H2: The stronger the tie, the more probability the Internet users pay attention to the shared post.

2.4 Emotions

The success of viral advertising is based on the active participation of consumers in sharing messages with others; therefore, the contents tend to be more about the emotional connection rather than the product itself (Ecklor & Bolls, 2011). Emotional connection has a key impact on whether online data like videos, pictures, and articles is forwarded. It must be developed in a viral marketing message to guarantee that the virus gets spread (Dobele et al., 2007). However, people do not really care when it comes to how consumers would react to what they are offered (Berger & Katherine, 2011).

Prior research stated human emotion as a thing which is fleeting and likes to focus on things. It can also be considered as a thing which evaluates stuff and express their likes and dislikes (Ecklor & Bolls, 2011). Most importantly, one of these systems become active when their mind is receiving something positive and the negative part of the mind is active in case of the mind-set of unpleasantness (negative feelings) (Ecklor & Bolls, 2011). Thanks to those systems, people can have emotional experiences (e.g. the feelings of unpleasant, pleasant, or the combination of both feelings). According to Dobele et al. (2007), there are six main kinds of emotion: surprise, joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust. Diverse emotion can cause diverse impacts on the forwarding behavior, as a result, significantly affecting the result of viral advertising campaigns (Dobele et al., 2007). Things that call the positive and negative sides, like anger, of the mind are more likely to reach the audience and have an effect on it rather than those of sadness (Dobele et al., 2007). In line with that, Chu (2011) stated that the strongest forwarding behavior is built by positive emotional tone. Furthermore, humorous ads can create the Joy emotion which can stir up the highest message involvement, highest attitude toward the ad (Ecklor & Bolls, 2011). Before sharing the content with their receivers, the senders had tendency to experience positive feelings (e.g., excited, happy) (Chu & Kim, 2011).

In order to motivate forwarding behavior, also known as the final decision stage, a viral advertising campaign has made an impression on the people that they will never forget (Dobele et al., 2007). Emotional content is one of the most important ways to evoke an unique emotional experience (Dobele et al., 2007). Marketers need to develop viral marketing message that will influence people in an emotional way and will spread throughout the crowd (Dobele et al., 2007). It would be even better if you could give people emotions on your business on the Internet, as it is more vital, in any case whether it causes positive or negative feelings (Berger & Katherine, 2011). Consequently, the hypothesis is concluded:

H3: Different type of emotions has different impacts on consumer behavior

3. Research Implications and Conclusion

The paper sheds light on the factors affecting the success of viral advertising which lead to theoretical framework for future research. Tie strength, perceptual affinity and emotions factors are taken into account to test their impact on the success of viral advertising. Although this paper is rather limited and exploratory in nature, it is among the first in an interesting research area that focused primarily on the effective customer decision making process associated with tie strength, perceptual affinity and emotion factors with efforts made to explore the mechanisms by which the relationship between effective-cognitive-behavioral aspects and outcomes occurs. To address this gap, our current

study investigates the effectiveness of tie strength, perceptual affinity and emotions on feel-do-learn process in consumer decision process. These elements have their own impact on different aspects of viral advertising to provide marketers a strong tool with which to develop a great viral campaign. Hence, to make a successful viral campaign, marketers should build up a solid seeding strategy by using strong tie and perceptual affinity, and the content inside needs to provide target audiences with surprise and joyful emotions. Future research should focus on empirical work to empirically test our propositions.

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