



Viral Advertisement: Conceptualisation of Factors Affecting Viral Behaviour

Nor Azimah Kamaruddin^{1*}, Amily Fikry², Lennora Putit³

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor

ABSTRACT

Objective –The objectives of this article are threefold; first, to identify factors affecting the effectiveness of social media advertising; second, to classify the factors into four main dimensions (namely: source, social, content and attitudinal); third, to conceptualise the factors and provide the proposition.

Novelty – The theoretical framework of this paper can be used to direct future empirical research to see how each construct affects consumer acceptance towards the advertisement and the spread of viral advertisement.

Type of Paper: Review

Keywords: Attitudinal; Factors; Social; Content; Source; Viral Advertisement; Viral Behaviour.

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JEL Classification: M30, M37, M39.

1. Introduction

Advertising effectiveness was formerly measured through purchasing behaviours, however, in the new era of marketing on social media, viral behaviour is more important because the purpose of social media advertising is to gain a broader customer coverage (Strauss & Frost, 2014) which eventually leads to purchasing behaviour. Generally, the broader the coverage of an advertisement, the more likely customers will make a purchase. Therefore, to measure the effectiveness of an ad in social media, viral behaviour is more significant (Strauss & Frost, 2014).

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* Corresponding author: Nor Azimah Kamaruddin

E-mail: norazimah198@yahoo.com

Affiliation: Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Previous literature on viral advertisement has focused only on a specific dimension without taking into account other dimensions that may equally influence viral behaviour. It is important to look at other factors from different angles. Thus, this paper combines all factors from different dimensions that may affect viral behaviour.

According to Hsieh, Hsieh and Tang (2012), factors affecting the effectiveness of online advertising can be categorized into four groups, namely: sources, content, channels and receiver. In contrast, Lin, Li and Wang (2017) categorized the dimensions of viral advertising study into organizations, advertising and e-word of mouth (sender and receiver).

Source dimension entails the characteristic of the communicator, while the receiver dimension concerns the recipient's demography. The content dimension refers to the information content of the subject in a query for a viral process, and channel dimension refers to the channel used to convey messages such as social media, blogs and email (Hsieh et. al., 2012). As this paper focuses on social media, the channel dimension is not taken into account when classifying the factors affecting the effectiveness of advertising on social media. Additionally, the receiver dimension refers to demographic characteristics such as gender, personality and age, which are beyond control as social media is borderless and the marketer cannot control the target audience. Since the receiver may also be a sender or a source, the receiver dimension concerns the attitudinal condition that describes the behavioural attitude of the receiver and the motivation to viral the advertisement (Palka, 2009). With that in mind, the receiver dimension is conceptualized as the attitudinal dimension in this paper.

Furthermore, as viral advertising is a word-of-mouth process between two parties that have a social relationship within the social media platform, social condition is one dimension that should be considered (Palka, 2009). Therefore, this paper will highlight all of the factors that influence the effectiveness of advertisements on social media by looking at various dimensions. The dimensions to be discussed in this paper are the source (which includes the organization or the individual who becomes the source of the advertisement), the social condition, and the content (which includes the advertisement characteristics and the attitudinal condition that motivates individuals to become a sender).

This paper begins with an introduction, followed by a literature review with sub-headings based on the dimensions discussed, the formation of propositions, managerial implications and a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

This section will discuss the factors that affect viral behaviour based on the dimensions identified, namely: source, social, content and attitudinal dimensions.

2.1 Source Dimension

The first dimension is a source dimension which concerns the characteristic of the communicator (Hsieh et. al., 2012). Source, in this paper, is likened to a broad umbrella concept that refers to multiple entities. One message can have multiple stages of sources (Stern, 1994). As a viral advertisement is a continuous dissemination process of word-of-mouth, the source can be a non-profitable individual or a company. The source is one of the important factors in the persuasive communication process and it is assessed through the characteristics of the source. Some of the source characteristics that have previously been studied include reputation, credibility (Esmailpour & Aram, 2016; Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana, & Islam, 2019; Tien, Amaya Rivas, & Liao, 2018) and trustworthiness (Alsamydai, 2016; Zainal, Harun, & Lily, 2017).

The reputation of the advertiser plays an important role and gives a signal that the source of a viral advertisement is credible and trusted. If an advertiser with a poor reputation is the source of a viral advert, the advert becomes less effective. However, the influence of trust and credibility between the social influence of the sender and receiver may overcome any effect of advertiser trust (Cho, Huh, & Faber, 2014).

In addition to reputation, credibility is also one of the source characteristics. Conceptually, credibility is the quality of being trusted and believed. According to MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), the credibility of an advertisement can be defined as "the extent to which the audience perceives claims made about the brand in the ad to be truthful and believable". In addition to component ad credibility, there are two forms of credibility that affect advert credibility, namely: advertising credibility and advertiser credibility. Advertising credibility refers to consumers' perceptions of the truthfulness and believability of advertising in general, while advertiser credibility is the notion of truthfulness or honesty of ad sponsors. Basically, the credibility in the advertising refers to the source itself whether it is about a brand or credibility of the presenter itself because of its reputation as a credible person.

Some studies believe that credibility is closely related to trust where the users value the advertising credibility based on the trust of the advertising source (Aghdaie, Sanayei, & Etebari, 2012). In contrast, Hajli, Sims, Zadeh, and Richard (2017) believe that credibility is one of the variables in the trust dimension. However, Cho et. al. (2014) argue that source trust differs from source credibility because trust focuses on relational characteristics involving two parties. Source trust is said to be more useful in examining viral messages. The distinction between these three studies concludes that trust and credibility are two different constructs having an effect on each other. Therefore, these two variables have a relationship with one another.

As argued by Cho et. al. (2014) that reputation is significant at the seeding level for a well-known brand, however, the credibility and trust of the individual as the source might overcome the drawback for small companies with a poor reputation. Thus, these three factors (reputation, credibility and trustworthiness) should be taken into account during both the seeding and diffusion level.

2.2 Social Dimension

The social dimension is an important variable in an individual life, both in terms of the developmental network (Dobrow, Chandler, Murphy, & Kram, 2012) or daily life as we live in a community. Furthermore, since viral advertisement is a process involving the transmission of a message between two parties, there is a social relationship between the two individuals, the source and the receiver. Social dimension entails the characteristic of a social relationship between two or more individuals that can present social pressures (Hong, 2018). The characteristics of social relationships can be described using variables such as tie strength (Ketelaar et. al., 2016) and subjective norms (Lee & Hong, 2016).

Tie strength is an indicator of the quality of the relationship, and according to Ketelaar et. al. (2016), the intention to pass on viral content among online social networks is stronger when the sender is a friend rather than a commercial source (companies) depending on the type of commercial and the motivation for creating it. Social media users are more likely to pass on viral content from the source of a viral advert when they need more info on the content while sending through friends is usually for entertainment and sharing good experiences. Further information on the content can be accessed through the interaction between the company and the viewer. Therefore, the tie strength between the sender and the receiver is more significant in encouraging intentions to act rather than the relationship strength between the company and the sender. People often respond with positive attitudinal behaviour when viral ads are sent by people they know and trust. The more people in their network, the faster the content is diffused in the social media circle (regardless of the attractiveness of the ads). Social influence plays a role in the diffusion stage when the designed ads are attractive from the seeding process and people usually share for entertainment. Thus, tie strength is one of the significant elements that influences viral behaviour.

Apart from tie strength, a subjective norm is also one of the variables in social dimensions that are robustly studied in viral marketing. Most research that studies subjective norms are constructed from the Theory of Reasoned Action or the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and some also conceptualize this as social influence. In essence, both terminologies refer to the individual perception that society determines whether he or she should or should not perform such action in the query (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). Additionally, Palka (2009)

argues that viral behaviour is strongly influenced by peer pressure where the individual is like to share content when they feels that the content does not affect their reputation among friends. Hence, subjective norms concern the image perceived by an individual to perform or not perform such an action. In contrast, Arif, Aslam, and Ali (2016) assume that social influence arises when others influence an individual's behaviour in a social group. In other words, when many of their friends share the content, the individual will also share it even though the person dis not have the intention to do so in the first place.

Since both terminologies are basically the same, but the definitions given by Palka (2009) and Arif et. al. (2016) are different, in this paper, the subjective norm is conceptualized as individual perceptions that the people around the individual decide whether content should be viral without affecting their image reputation. Social influence is also considered as one of the factors that affect viral behaviour conceptualized by the influence of people who viral the content; when a lot of their friends in social media share the content, the individual is also interested in sharing the content.

2.3 Content Dimension

Content dimension refers to the element of appeal and information provided in the content (Hsieh et. al., 2012). Barger, Peltier and Schultz (2016) agree that the content can have a powerful effect on the effectiveness of the advert. In other words, the appeal is a persuasive element that can persuade consumers to be interested in advertising.

Advertising appeal is among the variables studied in social media marketing research. According to Belch and Belch (2004), advertisement appeal refers to the approach used to attract customers to influence their feelings towards advert content and create a strong desire in customers' minds. The appeal can be categorized into two groups; emotional appeal and informational appeal. Emotional appeals relate to customers' social and/or psychological feelings and needs when they see an advert. Informational appeal is information about the product in the ads relating to the consumer's practical and functional need for a product.

Both of these appeals can affect individual attitudes toward advertising. For example, according to the Information Adoption Model, the information provided in an advertisement affects perceived usefulness where the individual feels that the content is useful through the information provided in the message (Kim, Kang, Choi, & Sung, 2016; Tien et. al., 2018). However, for emotional appeal, many types of emotions can influence consumer attitudes. As an example, entertainment, joy and excitement can stimulate perceived entertainment (Kim et. al., 2016). There is another dimension of appeal that is understudied, which is irritation. Hamouda (2018) argues that irritation is a non-robust predictor that affects the effectiveness of the advertising value. The variable is not significant to examine the factors affecting the effectiveness of advertising on social media. Therefore, in terms of content dimension, informational appeal and emotional appeal are predictors that affect the attitudes of an individual and also affect the effectiveness of an advertisement.

2.4 Attitudinal Dimension

The third dimension is an attitudinal dimension. In contrast to the social dimension, the attitudinal dimension focuses on the personal dimension and individual attitudes towards the subject (Hong, 2018). In this context, the attitudinal dimension describes behavioural attitudes of the recipients and their motivation to be the sender of the content. The attitudinal dimension is also the motivation of an individual which makes them share the content. Therefore, the content dimension and attitudinal dimension are closely related dimensions where the content forms the basis of the individual's attitudes (Palka, 2009).

The content dimension, specifically informational appeal, can affect the individual attitudes of perceived usefulness and have an emotional effect through perceived entertainment (Kim et. al., 2016). This is supported by research by Ketelaar et. al. (2016) which examines attitudinal appeal as a predictor in viral studies and finds that attitudes (including attitude toward adverts) are essential in determining the

effectiveness of viral advertisement in the social network context. These two attitudes act as motivation for an individual to viral the content.

In addition to the appeal that affects attitudes, attitude towards the ad in general may also be taken into account. This variable is often used as a mediator between predictors (Valaei, Rezaei, Ismail, & Oh, 2016). According to MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), attitude towards the advert is a predisposition to respond; whether to like the stimulated ads during exposure or not. Among the factors that influence attitudes towards the ad is an attitude towards the advertiser (in this context, it is discussed as a source that includes organizations and individuals) and an antecedent to attitude towards the advertiser is a perception towards the advertiser (as discussed earlier which includes reputation, credibility and trustworthiness. The conceptual definition of attitude toward the source is consistent with MacKenzie and Lutz’s (1989) definition as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistent manner, whether to like the sponsoring organization or not. In the context of this paper, sponsoring organization refers to the source of the advertisement. Therefore, it can be concluded that the attitudinal dimension also includes attitudes toward the source and attitudes toward the source affects attitudes toward the advert in general.

3. Proposition

By using viral behaviour as a measurement for advert effectiveness in social media, all predictors that have been classified into source dimension, social condition dimension, content dimension and attitudinal dimension have a direct relationship to viral behaviour. Apart from this direct relationship, there is also an indirect relationship between the content dimension and attitudinal dimension (Palka, 2009), and between source dimension and attitudinal dimension (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). In addition to the direct relationships and indirect relationships, there is also a correlation between credibility and trust.

The proposed proposition can be seen in the diagram below in which each variable is categorized and each dimension has a direct relationship with viral behaviour. In addition, the indirect relationship between the variables also can be (apart from viral behaviour) as shown in Figure 1. There is also a correlation between the two variables that are shown by using two-way arrows. The summary of the propositions can be seen in the conceptual framework in Figure 1.

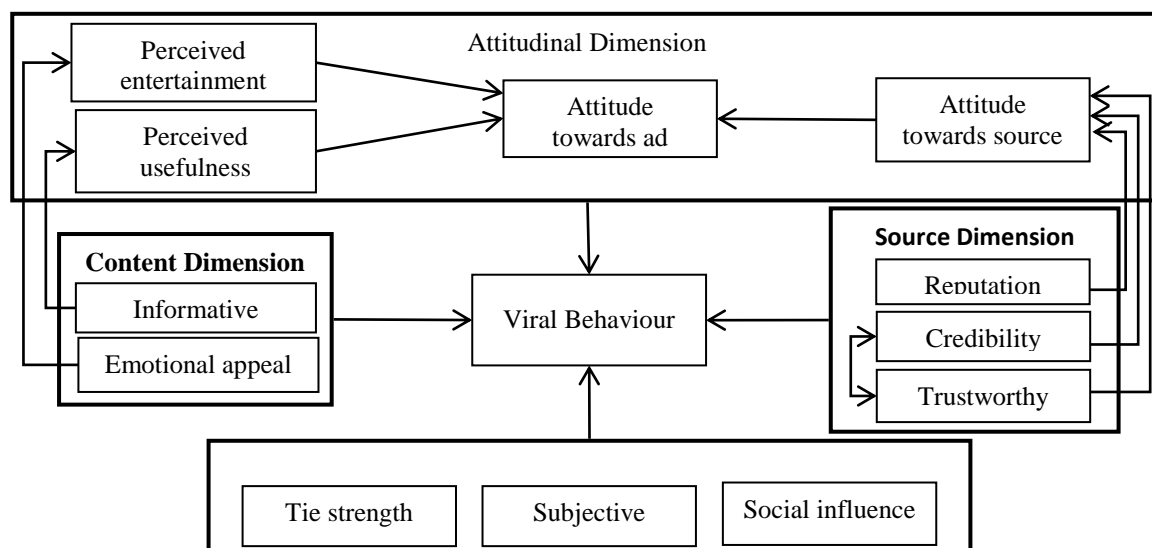


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

4. Managerial Implications

This study incorporates all dimensions that may influence the effectiveness of social media advertising. It provides worthy contributions for companies. Marketers are keen to know how to produce effective advertising on social media (Stelzner, 2017). By understanding what factors affect viral behaviour, companies will learn to understand how viral advertisement becomes effective which will help them to accentuate their advertisements.

5. Conclusion

The starting point for the consideration of this study is to understand the factors that influence the effectiveness of content comprising a variety of dimensions that includes: source, social factors, motivation and attitudes, and characteristics of the message. Therefore, it can be concluded that many factors affect viral behavior which are classified into four dimensions: source dimension, social dimension, content dimension and attitudinal dimension. Each dimension affects each other; for example, the content dimension affects individual attitudinal, and characteristics of the source affects the attitudes towards the source.

Although this paper has limitations, it gives an overview of possible factors influencing the effectiveness of advertising in social media. Based on the literature search, previous studies did not consider all of the factors affecting advertisement on social media. There is a need to test all of the factors in a single study and identify the most significant factors. From the results above, it is clear that companies should focus on the identified factors when designing their social media advertisements. Thus, the theoretical framework of this study can be used as a direction for future empirical research - to determine how each construct affects user acceptance of the advertisement.

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