The Impact of Viral Marketing Through Instagram

Darel Nicol Luna Anak Agam
Faculty of Economics and Management, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract

In this modern day, viral marketing is one of the trends for marketers to promote their product worldwide. Viral marketing has become a promotion tool for marketers in creating awareness of their products (Kusumadjaja, 2014). Viral marketing is a marketing technique whereby the information about the company’s goods or services is passed electronically from one internet use to another medium (Kusumadjaja, 2014). Apparently, the effectiveness of viral marketing in achieving its goals in promoting brand and products has become commonly used in Malaysia. This research was accomplished to study the impact of viral marketing through Instagram on consumer brand knowledge of fashion designer clothing line Maatin Shakir. The fashion designer himself, Maatin Shakir, utilizes viral marketing through Instagram platforms to increase consumer brand knowledge regarding his latest clothing line. Therefore, understanding the impact of viral marketing on consumer brand knowledge will help derive the most effective management approaches for the company. A different social media platform examined is Facebook. Apart from that, the goal for this research is to determine which social media application that most applicable for the company to practice viral marketing in boosting the company sales. Most of the marketers have turned to viral marketing to promote their brands and dive into reputation management as now the area is evolving rapidly (Kusumadjaja, 2014). Therefore, for this research, 100 questionnaires have been distributed to the client of Maatin Shakir which are also the active users of social media applications. The results concluded that the company’s viral marketing activities through social media really have an impact on its consumer brand knowledge.

Keywords: Instagram; Facebook; Viral Marketing; Social Media; Consumer Brand Knowledge

1. Introduction

In the early 1990s, viral marketing focused more on TV advertisements (Kusumadjaja, 2014). Social media is the new version of word of mouth (WOM) marketing. This research is to investigate the effectiveness of viral marketing on Instagram in promoting sales of products of Maatin Shakir’s clothing line. This has been conducted to help establish the effectiveness of viral marketing outside a test environment. This will be explored through the use of a questionnaire.

Instagram is changing how brands and consumers interact in the 21st century. As a result, in 2014 the social media Instagram managed to attracts 40% of top brands in the world (Scissons et al., 2015). Apparently in 2015 the statistic of recognize brands in the world realized the routine of using Instagram for their internet marketing drastically boost up to 71% which covered all the renounce international brands (Scissons et al., 2015). The popular app hosts profiles for 92% of well-known brands. As social networking sites have a significant impact on consumers’ decision-making process and behaviors, these sites cannot be disregarded by brands, of which the target audience actively uses digital channels.

In Malaysia, particularly for Maatin Shakir’s business, Instagram is really a positive turning point for his business. The exposure of his products based on viral marketing through Instagram really helps in increasing the sales of his products. As a result, by reposting his latest products through Instagram, it
create the brand awareness among his clients, potential clients, and target markets everywhere around the world which still can be accessed through the Internet.

Viral marketing is a type of WOM marketing technique used on the Internet (Akyol, 2013). Viral marketing concept, which was first used by Steve Jurvetson and Tim Draper (Pelphs vd.), is defined as “a WOM marketing technique used in relation to a brand, product, or service similar to the spread of viruses on social networks on electronic media” (Quoted from MindComet, 20062 by: Dahan, 2012).

It is a part of electronic WOM marketing because it is a part of electronic media, and the main reason of its separation is that the starting point of this activity is known or thought to be companies. Dialogs related to services or products started with individuals’ own will are observed in viral marketing activities.

Viral marketing through Instagram is more efficient and effective. In addition to that, viral marketing through Instagram is free and it is good to create brand awareness. As a result, Maatin Shakir’s brand has reached the effectiveness of brand awareness among his clients. Apart from that, Instagram really helps in spreading news and latest updated information regarding Maatin Shakir’s fashion collection.

2. Literature Review

As a result of being a basic need for people, social media will reunite everyone around the globe, and as a result, these social media are adopted by millions of people in a very short period of time (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). Most of these sites enabled the existing social relations and/or social networks to be transferred to the Internet. Furthermore, this has made the social media application users to get involved actively in the world of internet and this trend has become a normal routine for the nation’s development.

As the most accessible networks in the same socioeconomic group with similar interests, the contents transferred through digital social networks are spread in a targeted manner because the desire to get more information regarding almost everything, which is one of the main reasons of people frequently visiting digital social sites (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). Creating social networks on online platforms has become very popular in this era.

Online networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn continue to add more than 100,000 users in a day (Scissons et al., 2015). The fastest growing group on Facebook, which has more than 500 million active users, is the group of people aging 35+. Globally, more than 11.7 million h/month are spent on Facebook and more than 200 million users access Facebook using their mobile devices. Social media have also become popular among big hospitals and pharmaceutical companies (Scissons et al., 2015).

There are nearly 1100 hospitals nationwide on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, or blogs. Various information ranging from recent developments in health sector to ongoing organization events are transferred among hospitals through these sites. Pharmaceutical companies have developed many social networking sites including disease support pages and special product information (Akyol, 2013).

Fortis Turkey has realized its first brand application on Facebook, which is a social networking site. About 4500 users in the first 3 days and 20,000 users in the first month joined “Fortis Turkey Cup Guessing Game.” The application was started before group matching and users were allowed to guess game scores according to the league table. Those making the best score guess were listed at the end of each game week.

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace have started to change companies’ product marketing methods and ways of communication with consumers (Akyol, 2013). The viral marketing concept suggests that marketers should continue to use the power of interpersonal networks to promote a product or service (Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). This form of customer-to-customer communication is an effective means of influencing potential target market to buy the products (Lekhanya, 2014). Viral marketing exploits the existing social networks by encouraging customers to share product information with their friends (Leskovec et al., 2008).
It is evident that the viral nature of the Internet indicates that a negative comment about the company can spread easily and it is always very difficult to undo the damage done (Larson, 2009). According to a MindComet Corporation white paper (2008), the Internet has radically changed the concept of WOM marketing. The term “Viral marketing” was addressed by venture capitalist Steve Jurvetson in 1997 and was used to describe Hotmail’s email practice of appending advertising of them to outgoing user mail. The research found that if such an advertisement reaches “susceptible” users, the same users will become “infected” (i.e., sign up for an account) and then go on to infect other susceptible users.

However, according to Klooper, the viral marketing concept enables consumers to spread the information regarding the products and services through online or through other digital media, which overshadow the traditional marketing practices (Klopper, 2012). Viral marketing is the new generation of WOM marketing (Lekhanya, 2014). The key driver in viral marketing is the effectiveness of unsolicited, electronic referrals to create awareness, trigger interest, and generate sales or product adoption (Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). Successful viral marketing campaigns comprise an engaging message that involves imagination, fun, and intrigue, encourages the ease of use and visibility, targets credible sources, and leverages combinations of technology (Dobele et al., 2016).

Conventionally, WOM marketing has been proven to be most effective, obtaining a customer base and bolstering sales (Datta et al., 2008). Apart from that, viral marketing has become the defining marketing trend of the decade (Larson, 2009). Viral marketing is easily spread around the globe because it takes on the trend of spreading the virus at an exponential fashion and portrays this spread as a positive sharing of information to others within a network. TV advertisement has the same concept as spreading virus which the roles of virus is to seek more benefits and take pleasure in finding and send on for someone else to enjoy (Larson, 2009). Furthermore, same with TV advertisement, it can spread the knowledge or news based on visual that has been show on TV for the viewers (Larson, 2009). Viral marketing takes the traditional roots of WOM marketing and exponentially expands the reach through social networks, blogs, and other technological media (Datta et al., 2008).

WOM marketing is such a successful marketing strategy because it creates the “familiarity, personal connection, care, and trust” between the consumer and the translator of the information (Datta et al., 2005, p. 70). Viral marketing reflects the basic premise of traditional WOM marketing, only on a significantly larger scale. Companies have been trying for years to get a handle on WOM advertising to make it work to the advantage of the company (Jenkins, 2004). The rise of the Internet and subsequent technologies and online platforms has resulted in a truly attainable way for corporations to positively benefit from online WOM advertising strategies (Jenkins, 2004).

Companies must now employ a new focus strategy to continue to engage consumers (Jenkins, 2004). Employing a “holistic marketing framework” to move from a company-driven to a customer-driven strategy resonates with the consumer and allows for “the capacity to offer customized products, services, programs, and messages” (Jenkins, 2004). Viral marketing provides one of those media to achieve this new objective. Through blogs and other viral formats, “customized online communities of opinion leaders enable brands to build deep relationships with their target audience, thereby providing a unique opportunity to increase the brand awareness (Datta et al., 2008).”

Another example of a successful viral marketing campaign was the “Let’s Say Thanks” campaign by Xerox (Klopper, 2012) whereby the campaign results were viral more than 1.5 million messages sent from their company website in the first month alone. The viral marketing campaign developed by Xerox allowed consumers to create and send a heartfelt message to military personnel globally (Klopper, 2012). Additional coverage provided to the company at no cost from this viral marketing campaign was achieved from the news media coverage by Fox News and CNN of the campaign and its positive impact on the military (Klopper, 2012). Gillette implemented a viral marketing campaign to boost sales of the company’s new three-blade Venus razor. The company sent a truck around Florida during spring break and combined the billboard style truck panel advertising with a sweepstakes and an opportunity to share information about the sweepstakes with friends through a digital greeting card. The digital greeting card included photos of the contestant at the beach (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). The result of their digital campaign was that more than 20% of the sweepstakes’ entries came from the
receivers of viral e-cards (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). The statistic from Ellison and Boyd in the year 2013 shows that viral marketing has the potential to be part of the company promotion tools.

3. Research Method

In line with the scope of the research, the questionnaires will be distributed to the focus of 100 respondents of Instagram and Facebook users who are also the clients of Maatin Shakir clothing line through structured questionnaires. The data thus collected are tabulated and analyzed through a statistical software package and results are shown in the following slides.

As a result, questionnaires were only distributed to Instagram followers who already purchased Maatin Shakir clothing line. Therefore, the Instagram followers who already purchased Maatin Shakir collection will follow Maatin’s official Instagram for his latest products’ update. Maatin Shakir’s Instagram followers are male or female in the age group of 17 to 40 years (working professionals/students).

Additionally to the sample being part of the study, the individuals had to be exposed to the Instagram application and had experienced preview of the promotion for Maatin Shakir’s products. There are 100 questionnaires that will be distributed to this research based on Krejcie Morgan table of population.

4. Theoretical and Practitioners’ Implications

From the data collection, this research found the following:

4.1. Eighty-nine respondents mostly prefer Instagram rather than Facebook

From this, the respondents agree to choose Instagram on sharing all the latest and updated information regarding Maatin Shakir clothing line. In addition to that, Maatin Shakir has more followers on Instagram comprising 4750 followers compared to Facebook following fan page of Maatin Shakir’s Official Fanpage that consists of 913 followers who likes the Maatin Shakir Official Facebook fanpage.

4.2. Ninety respondents agree that viral marketing gives customers freedom to talk about Maatin Shakir’s company

Based on this, the respondents mentioned that, through viral marketing, it is easy for them to criticize regarding the products and this can help to improve more on the quality of the products. It shows that it not only focuses on the negative comments to viral the product, but also helps improve the product. This will be a bad situation if the negative comments or bad comments were not monitored by Maatin himself.

4.3. Forty-six respondents agree that Maatin Shakir’s companies gain more popularity through the use of a viral marketing platform through Instagram repost

For this particular section, it shows that most of the respondents were aware about the existing products from the viral of the post through Instagram. One of the posts was viral in 2014, once this brand was gradually exposed through Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week. This clothing line became more well-known inside the Malaysia fashion industry.

4.4. Eighty-five respondents agree that viral marketing on Instagram helps them to know the latest product/collections by Maatin Shakir’s company

In this section, the respondents mentioned that Instagram can help them know more about Maatin’s latest design. In addition to that, viral marketing through Instagram helps to expose more. The implications of this study include issues related to viral marketing practice. Align with the findings,
Maatin Shakir should improve better company marketing communication strategy via Instagram which can help to clear up few doubt or deliver any latest update regarding the Maatin Shakir clothing line. New concepts and theories in viral marketing campaigns and strategies for companies should be proposed and implemented. The important elements for viral marketing practices in Malaysia should be further emphasized. This means that Malaysian company owners/managers need to implement viral marketing and should understand its concept. This is essentially an applied viral marketing study related to marketing strategy, limiting the contribution to marketing theory.

This study intends to establish an understanding and knowledge with regard to the impact of viral marketing on corporate brand reputation within the company, with specific reference to Maatin Shakir’s clothing line. Further studies on the benefits of viral marketing strategies in Malaysian companies should be encouraged as these have the potential of increasing company brand’s awareness, popularity, image, trust, and ensuring long-term company and customer relationships.

Based on the findings of this study, further research could include similar studies in other Malaysia’s fashion designers in this fashion industry and provinces with a large sample to assess whether these findings are typical of all provinces. In-depth qualitative research would assist in better understanding of the nature of viral marketing problems experienced by Malaysian companies and their attitudes toward viral marketing and the expenditure of financial resources on viral marketing activities.

A study by the various Malaysian company managers on the attitude toward, and knowledge of, viral marketing would be helpful with regard to identifying ways to improve the use of viral marketing by Malaysian companies. Companies’ marketing managers must notify the target customers/users about the company’s social network websites’ terms and conditions in place, which govern the use of the company’s website, to minimize negative comments. Company newsletters should also be supplied to communities to teach them about good communication ethics, including communicating through websites.

5. Limitations

In able for the product Maatin Shakir clothing line are able to spread the information regarding their latest clothing line collection, Maatin Shakir should practice Viral Marketing as part of the company promotional tool. Maatin Shakir should improve their promotion strategy via online social media application which is Instagram. Apart from that Maatin Shakir should adapt the online entrepreneurial knowledge skills to align it together with viral marketing which can help to boost up the company sales Knowledge skills.

Maatin Shakir’s marketing managers must have very well knowledge based on the market environment that consists of target markets and which collection they purchase the most and when they decide to purchase it.

It is recommended that Maatin Shakir should fully utilize viral marketing with the aid of social networking websites such as Instagram to create brand awareness which helps to increase the sales of his products.

References

Kusumadjaja, L. (2014), The impact of viral marketing through social media on BCD’s consumer brand knowledge. iBuss Management, 2(2), 162-172.
Larson, R.J. (2009), The rise of viral marketing through the new media of social media. Faculty Publications and Presentations, 18, 11-23.