Original Researcher Article

Does Brand Association impacts Viral Marketing and Women Purchase Intention for Cosmetic products?

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has propelled the marketing field, and viral marketing has become a potent strategy to enhance the purchase intention in today's market. The current study was aimed at finding out how the brand association creates an impact on the viral marketing and consumers' purchase intention relationships in the cosmetic sector. Under the quantitative technique, the research was carried out in the town of Udaipur, Tripura, India. 340 respondents has been chosen through the simple random sampling technique. The structured questionnaire was used to gather the data by the female respondents following the ethical considerations of the research and analysis of the data was done using structural equation modelling in AMOS 21. Mediation analysis between viral marketing, brand association and purchase intention in the cosmetic sector has been performed to cheque the interrelationship between them. The findings reveal that there is a presence of a partial mediation effect due to the involvement of brand association in between the effect of viral marketing towards the purchase intention that emphasises the importance of building and maintaining strong brand associations to enhance the impact of viral marketing strategies. The investigation provides new empirical data to the small body of literature on digital marketing and consumer behaviour in the north eastern part of India.

Keywords: Viral Marketing , Purchase intention , Brand Association, Structural equation modeling, Consumer behaviour

INTRODUCTION:

In today's date, due to the proliferation of the internet and advancement of technologies due to the internet, viral marketing has become a potent strategy in the marketing field. Viral marketing is a strategic approach that generates highly shareable content that spreads rapidly across the digital platforms, leveraging word of mouth. It harnesses the power of social media and online communities to share the marketing message at an affordable price. Viral marketing campaigns employ emotional, entertaining, and thought-provoking content, which compels consumers to share within the network, thereby influencing the people in their networks. Influencing the consumers' desire to buy, or the probability that they would purchase a product or service, is one of the principal outcomes of viral marketing. With an effective execution, viral campaigns can create strong emotional connections with the audience and can make them inclined to trust the brand and consider its offerings (Huang et al., 2013). Authentic viral content boosts consumer views of the credibility of a brand, its value, and its relevance, which are the major elements driving their purchase decisions. Brand association plays a vital role in this context, as it refers to the attributes and the psychological associations that customers associate with a brand. Viral marketing campaigns have been used in various firms, including technological, fashion, and cosmetics, to increase the sales volume and solidify the identity of the brand (Hinz et al., 2011). Through the suggestions, reviews, and instructions of cosmetic influencers as well as celebrities on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, they play an essential role in the cosmetic business by raising awareness (Hinz et al., 2011). The attitude of the brand, the brand recall, and the intention to purchase are influenced by positive brand association. The brand that has positive brand association is likely to be remembered and preferred by the consumers when these associations are reinforced with engaged and acceptable marketing efforts (Erdem and Swait, 1998). In the early studies it has been observed that very few researches have been conducted taking brand association, which has created a necessity to test the impact of this essential element having its influence on the impact of viral marketing on the purchasing intention. At the international level there are numerous studies that have been conducted on viral marketing, purchase intention, and brand equity components, whereas at the national level none of the studies have been found that have carried out the study considering the brand association as a mediator. Therefore, the current study has created the opportunity to conduct the study on the viral marketing effect on consumer behaviour considering the cosmetic industry.

LITERATUREREVIEW

Recent studies conducted by Chowdhury et al. (2025) as well as Bhowmik and Dev Chowdhury (2024)in Agartala has shown significant effect of viral marketing on consumers' purchase intention through brand awareness and brand loyalty among the women towards cosmetic products. Moreover, using SEM through AMOS, a sample of 479 web fashion consumers was done by Shatnawi et al. (2024), who studied the impact of total viral marketing on consumers' purchase intention in Jordan within the context of the fashion industry. Viral Marketing and the Purchase Intention Although evidence supporting the positive relation between viral marketing and consumer purchase intention is scarce, prior empirical studies have identified a positive relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention. Jayasuriya et al. (2024) focused on analysing the factors of referral marketing programs on user engagement in social media within the cosmetic industry with the application of SEM in Smart-PLS. Based on the study's findings, customers desire to join social media referral programs is influenced by brand, prize, and celebrity endorsement. Mediating by Brand Equity: With brand equity as a mediator between viral marketing and purchase intention of millennials, a study is made by Lakruwan (2023) among 384 respondents from Sri Lanka. With the structural equation modelling in Smart-PLS, he found that brand equity significantly influences the effect of viral marketing on purchase intention. It has been found that brand preference & viral marketing are partially mediated due to brand recognition. Among younger respondents, a positive impact of viral marketing and brand preference has been found as compared to the older respondents in Thailand when Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2021) conducted the study among 286 respondents to test the role of viral marketing on brand recognition and brand preference in social media by employing SEM using SPSS AMOS 22. Among 200 shoppers in Tehran, Choshaly and Mirabolghasemi (2020) investigated the use of viral marketing to forecast consumers' intention to buy eco-labelled products, where the data was analysed with SEM using Smart PLS 3.0, which concludes that the level of information, entertainment, and source credibility has an encouraging effect on consumers' intentions to buy eco-labelled items, whereas irritation has the detrimental effect. With the application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in AMOS within 135 responders in Bandung, Indonesia, Mustikasari and Widaningsih (2018) analysed the impact of viral marketing on purchase decisions through brand awareness, which concludes that due to the use of social media in viral marketing, the brand awareness increases and it impacts the purchase decisions. Ringim and Reni (2018), with 187 respondents, conducted a study in Indonesia to find social media's impact as a mediator on consumer buying behaviour towards cosmetics, where they applied multiple mediation models with intention and attitude as the mediators with various factors impacting them. With the application of structural equation modelling using Smart-PLS, the researchers have highlighted that the buying behaviour of the consumers is predicted by social media, which is influenced by the attitude. With a descriptive research design, Trivedi (2017) studied the viral marketing effect on consumer behaviour among 360 students of Gen Y and employed structural equation modelling (SEM) using SPSS AMOS and observed that viral marketing does not directly influence purchase intention. However, the attitude of the brand and the engagement of the messaging process mediate the relation between viral marketing and purchase intention. Based on all the literature considered for the study, it implies the viral marketing effects on the purchase intention through brand association (a component of brand equity). This research suggests the following alternative hypothesis following the Baron and Kenny as well as Preacher and Hayes conditions for mediation (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

H1: Purchase intention is predicted by viral marketing.

H2: Brand association is predicted by viral marketing.

H3: Viral marketing indirectly predicts purchase intention through brand association

METHODOLOGY

Through a quantitative technique , this study has observed the brand association potential to regulate the viral marketing effect on purchase intention. Previous literature has revealed that most of the researchers have chosen urban areas to conduct the viral marketing study because of the internet and technological availability in those areas. Following this approach, this research has adopted the same methodology, considering the urban area of Udaipur, Tripura. Tripura is the third internet gateway of India, which is an isolated region in the Northeast and connected through the Chicken Neck, i.e., the Siliguri Corridor , to the rest of the country. Moreover, Udaipur is a famous religious tourist place in Tripura situated in the Gomati District of the state, which likely has some significant effect on its urban area. Moreover, this study has specifically focused on women consumers because they are more frequent purchasers of cosmetic products. The population that has been chosen is 18+sincetheyare considered the responsible decision-makers. The target population has been chosen considering the latest municipal election 2021 data, which contains the target population. This data has been chosen since there is an unavailability of the updated census report of India with the population data of all the districts. Structural equation modeling has been adopted to carry out the causal relationship between the variables in the present research. Therefore, to employ SEM, the sample size ratio of 1:20 has been adopted, which implies 20 samples for every parameter (Kline, 2015). In this study, there are 17 constructs; therefore, the total sample size is 340(17X20= 340). A simple random method was used to select respondents, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire to maintain a high level of ethical aspects of the study. The traffic-light questionnaire includes demographics and items from viral marketing, purchase intention, and brand association (exposure measures). Data is analysed using IBM SPSS AMOS Version 21.

Questionnaire development

There are two sections in the questionnaire that have been employed to collect the data from the respondents. The first section deals with the demographic data, whereas the second section deals with the questions associated with viral marketing, brand association, and purchase intention, and these constructs have been measured on a Likert scale. The purchase intention questions have been gathered from Chen et al. (2013), the brand association constructs have been gathered from Ler (2014), and the viral marketing constructs have been gathered from Lakruwan et al. (2023).

Table1: Questionnaire constructs and variables

Constructs	Items	Observed Variables
Viral Marketing	VM1	Cosmetic brand viral marketing message is entertaining
	VM2	Cosmetic brand viral marketing message provides exact product information
	VM3	Viral marketing messages from brands can be trusted
	VM4	Viral marketing campaign contain incentives
	VM5	I get irritated when the advertisements that annoy, offend or insult me
Purchase Intention	PI1	The brand is reputable
	PI2	Ads of the brand is attractive
	PI3	The brand that I use, charge fare prices
	PI4	The brand has longevity than other brands
	PI5	The brand has good store environment
	PI6	The performance of the product has met my expectations
	PI7	Good quality material is used for packaging
Brand Association	BAS1	The Cosmetic Brand has individuality
	BAS2	The Cosmetic brand is intriguing
	BAS3	I can clearly imagine the target audience of this brand
	BAS4	The cosmetic brand manufacturer is trust worthy
	BAS5	The cosmetic brand manufacturer is good

Data analysis and results

From the descriptive table, it can be observed that the maximum number of respondents is between 18 and 25, which is followed by 26-33, 34-41, 42-49, and 50 and above. Most of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree, secondary education level, doctoral degree, primary level of education, and other degrees. A major portion of the respondents are students, followed by private employees, business owners, government employees, and respondents who are not yet employed. Out of the 340 responders, a major portion of the responders have a monthly income (in INR) between 20K and 30K, followed by 10K-20K, above 50K, 30K-40K, and 40K-50K

Table2: Descriptive statistics

Descriptive	Attributes	Counts(% values)
Age group	18 to 25	110(32.33)
	26 to 33	94(27.67)
	34 to 41	60(17.67)
	42 to 49	40(11.67)

|		
	50&above	36(10.66)
	Total	**340(100)**
Educational Level	Elementary level	2(0.67)
	Secondary level	40(12)
	Bachelor level	204(60)
	Master level	75(22)
	Ph.D.	9(2.67)
	Others	0(2.67)
	Total	**340(100)**
Employment Status	Not employed	38(11)
	Govt. Employee	58(17)
	Private Employee	74(21.67)
	Business	66(19.33)
	Student	105 (31)
	Total	**340(100)**
Family Income per month	10,000 to 20,000	86(25.33)
	20,000 to 30,000	153(45)
	30,000 to 40,000	25(7.33)
	40,000 to 50,000	23(6.67)
	above50,000	53(15.67)
	Total	**340(100)**

The table 3 addresses the model fitness. In the table it could be observed that the data fits the chi square to degrees of freedom (X^2/df) ratio quite well indicating a good match. The CFI value is 0.951, TLI value stands at 0.974, the NFI value is at 0.937 while the AGFI value is 0.923 which indicates that the model fit is good. Moreover, both the RMSEA & SRMR values are <0.05 this implies that there is minimal residual error.

Table3: Model Fit Indices

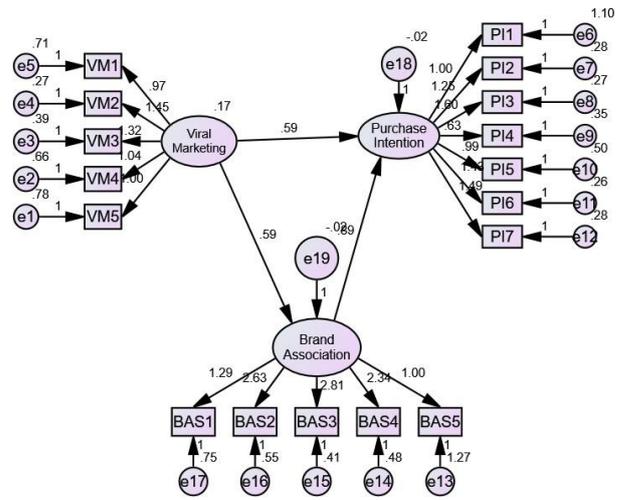| Fit Index	Model Value	Model evaluation
Chisquare (X^2/df)	1.79	Good fit
CFI	0.951	Excellent fit
TLI	0.974	Excellent fit
NFI	0.937	Excellent fit
AGFI	0.923	Excellent fit
RMSEA	0.02	Good fit
SRMR	0.04	Good fit

Source; Calculated from Primary data in SPSS AMOS

Figure1: Covariance model
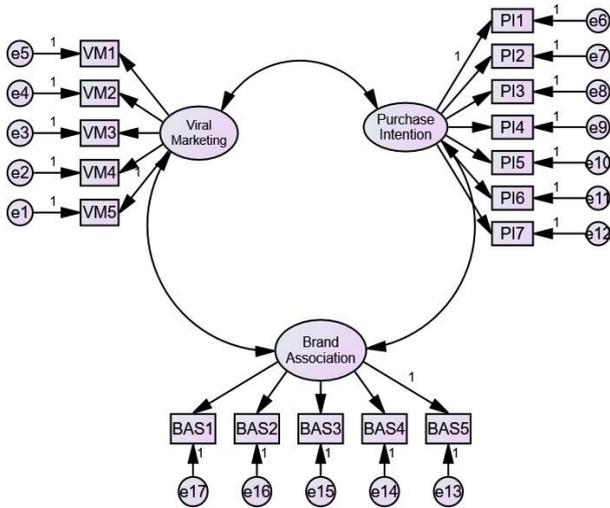
Source-Primary data calculation in AMOS

Figure2: SEM output model

Source: Primary data Calculation in AMOS

The factor loadings are prescribed in Table 3. In this case the viral marketing's highest involvement rate is 0.788 (VM4), while the lowest involvement rate is 0.697 (VM3). Among the purchase intentions, the factor PI2 has the highest involvement rate, while the factor PI7 has the lowest involvement rate, 0.651. BAS1 with the value 0.793 has the highest involvement rate in the case of brand association, while BAS3 has the lowest involvement rate at 0.639.

Table4: standardized regression table

Variables			Estimates
VM5	<---	VM	0.756
VM4	<---	VM	0.788
VM3	<---	VM	0.697
VM2	<---	VM	0.754
VM1	<---	VM	0.780
PI1	<---	PI	0.777
PI2	<---	PI	0.791
PI3	<---	PI	0.723
PI4	<---	PI	0.734
PI5	<---	PI	0.703
PI6	<---	PI	0.765
PI7	<---	PI	0.651
BAS5	<---	BAS	0.736
BAS4	<---	BAS	0.718
BAS3	<---	BAS	0.639
BAS2	<---	BAS	0.727
BAS1	<---	BAS	0.793

Source : Primary data Calculation in AMOS

The regression weights of Viral Marketing, Brand Association and Purchase Intention could be observed in table 4. The relation between Viral Marketing and Brand Association has significant value <0.05 which implies that the independent variable(VM) predicts the dependent variable(PI). The p value stands <0.05 in the regression between Brand Association (BAS) and Viral Marketing (VM) that implies a significant relation between the variables. Also, there is significant relation between BAS and PI with the p-value <0.05. According to Preacher and Hayes model, if the mediator indicates dependent-independent relationship while the direct effect remain significant then there is presence of partial mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2004,2008).

Table4: Overall Regression Weights

Determinants			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
BAS	<---	VM	0.756	0.245	3.086	***
PI	<---	VM	0.812	0.192	4.229	***
PI	<---	BAS	0.869	0.325	2.674	***

Source :Primary data Calculation in AMOS

Conclusion and Policy Formulation

Due to the internet proliferation, the marketing field has been altered, and viral marketing has been an effective strategy for interacting with consumers, specifically in the cosmetic sector. This study has observed the brand association's partial mediating behaviour in the effect between viral marketing and purchase intention, which simply implies that viral marketing itself impacts the consumer's intention to purchase, and when brand association is added, it amplifies the effect. Therefore, based on the partial mediation, a strategic policy combining Viral Marketing (VM) and Brand Association (BAS) as a mediator is recommended in order to enhance consumer purchase intention (PI). The importance of quick engagement and long-term brand growth is highlighted by viral marketing, which has a direct impact on purchase intention (PI) as well as an indirect impact through brand association (BAS). Businesses should set their attention on producing viral content that is appealing to emotions along with the brand's identity in order to increase exposure and gain customer trust. This involves employing influencer connections, utilising data-driven audience targeting, and continuously showcasing the brand's USPs across all points of contact. As the mediating variable, BAS fills the gap between VM and PI's effect. To improve brand association, businesses should invest in strengthening brand trust, such as omnichannel marketing efforts, quality control plans, and community engagement activities. By developing emotional bonds with customers and enhancing brand recall, these efforts will strengthen the relationship between VM and PI. To ensure that the efforts are as inclusive and relevant as possible, it is also important to consider the moderating effect of gender. Variable consumer preference could be revealed through gender-specific segmentation, permitting more focused marketing campaigns that reduce differences in campaign effectiveness. To analyse the direct influence of viral marketing (VM), regular performance evaluations by utilising structural equation modelling should be conducted. This comprehensive approach ensures long-term gain in the market share as well as brand equity in addition to rapid enhancements in the intention to purchase. This research work has been performed specifically in Udaipur, Gomati Tripura, India, within a limited population and limited variables; therefore, it is suggested that researchers conduct a similar study in a different geographical region with different mediating variables to analyse the further impact on the viral marketing and purchase intention relation.

Authors Contribution

All the authors associated with this study have contributed equally for conceptualizing ,methodological design, formal analysis, investigation ,writing the original draft, editing & supervising in the current research

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