Abstract. *The rapid advancement of technology has opened many cost-effective avenues for marketers to promote their products. One of the emerging techniques of products promotion through the use of technology is viral marketing that is becoming a popular direct marketing tool for marketers across the world. Therefore, marketers should understand factors that result in increased acceptance of viral marketing by consumers. The present research was conducted to investigate consumers' attitude towards viral marketing in Pakistan. The data was gathered through a five point Likert scale questionnaire from 216 respondents across Pakistan. Correlation and regression analysis were carried out to find out the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The study findings indicate a positive relationship between the independent variables of informativeness, entertainment and source credibility with the dependent variable of attitude towards viral marketing, informativeness and source credibility being the most important attributes affecting attitude towards viral marketing, whereas, irritation has no significant affect on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. Implications for the marketing managers are to design and deliver viral marketing messages through a credible source that provides informative, entertaining, authentic and trustworthy messages to customers. Moreover, the adoption of permission based marketing concept in viral marketing campaigns may lead to a more positive consumers' attitude towards viral marketing in Pakistan.*

Keywords: viral marketing, consumers' attitude, Pakistan.

CONSUMERS'ATTITUDE TOWARDS VIRAL MARKETING IN PAKISTAN

Kiani Irshad ZERNIGAH
Muhammad Ali Jinnah University
Islamabad Expressway, Kahuta Road, Zone-V
Islamabad, Pakistan
e-mail: zernigahkiani88@hotmail.com

Kamran SOHAIL
Fatima Jinnah Women University
The Mall, Rawalpindi, Pakistan
e-mail: sohail@fjwu.edu.pk

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1. Introduction

Internet and Mobile Phone technologies have been adopted by contemporary people very rapidly across the World. Technological outburst and latest modes of communication have provided companies with new means of advertising their products and brands (Pelău and Zegreanu, 2010). Consequently, the online methods of advertising for creating brand awareness are likely to receive more attention by customers as compared to the conventional ways of advertising (Fagerstrom and Ghinea, 2010). With the advent of technology, public media consumption patterns have also changed and people prefer spending more time online (Drury, 2008). Therefore, many companies are increasingly relying on new modes of interactive technologies for promoting their products and services (Haghirian et al., 2005).

One of the modern methods for promotion of products and services through the use of interactive technology is called viral marketing. Viral marketing, also known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become an important marketing trend for communicating products and services (Ferguson, 2008). According to Palka et al. (2009, p. 172) *"the term viral describes a type of marketing that infects customers with an advertising message which passes from one customer to the next like a rampant flu virus"*. In viral marketing people can pass on product information to their social network, which makes it an effective technique for creating brand awareness. Moreover, it is one of the highly ranked techniques used by consumers not only for gathering information about products but also for making purchase decisions (Cruz and Fill, 2008). In viral marketing, interaction with companies and other consumers are conducted via e-mail, instant messaging, homepages, blogs, forums, online communities, newsgroups, chat rooms, hate sites, review sites, and social networking sites (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006; Woerndl et al., 2008). People are normally willing to pass on viral marketing messages to their social networks, which potentially increase message reliability in the eyes of the message recipients. A strong viral promotion can reach thousands of consumers and can inspire them to buy a brand (Chiu et al., 2007; Bampo et al., 2008).

According to statistics, two-thirds of the world's Internet population visits a social networking site or a blogging site (Nielsen, 2009). Similarly, time spent visiting social network sites now exceeds the time spent emailing. Around 52 percent of the people, who find news online, share it with their friends either through social networks, e-mails or posts (Morrissey, 2009). Likewise, Facebook has more than 750 million active users and more than 250 million users' access social network sites through their mobile devices (Facebook Statistics, 2011). In Pakistan the number of internet users has increased by 12 percent since the year 1999 and currently there are more than 20 million internet users in Pakistan and around 4 million people are members of social networking sites (World Bank, 2011). Similarly, Pakistan is the seventh largest country of the world in terms of mobile phone users with total number of subscriptions exceeding the figure of 107 million in July 2011. More than 60% of the Pakistani population owns a mobile phone (Telecom indicators, 2011).

Viral marketing is a relatively new phenomenon and is at an early stage of development. Therefore, the knowledge about its nature, characteristics and dimensions is yet to be explored in depth (Cruz and Fill, 2008). In order to make viral marketing campaigns effective, it is necessary that right message should be delivered to right people. Motivations to forward viral messages depend a lot on the message contents and its features. The message should be persuasive, interesting, and memorable for generating audience's interest and motivating them to pass it on to their social network (Eckler and Bolls, 2011). Therefore, marketers should understand factors that result in increased acceptance of viral marketing by consumers. During this research, it has come to light that there is a lack of research in the field of viral marketing in Pakistani market. As to best of our knowledge no research is carried out on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing in the Pakistani context.

Therefore, this research investigates consumers' attitude towards viral marketing in Pakistan. More specifically, the study examines consumer attitude towards various factors of viral marketing messages such as, perceived informativeness, entertainment, source credibility, and irritation that significantly affect consumers' attitude towards viral marketing messages.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Viral marketing

Viral marketing has become an increasingly popular promotional tool for many brands (Eckler and Bolls, 2011). Its advantages over the conventional media include its ability to deliver more targeted and personalized messages; high speed of message transmission and behavioral responses are potentially more quantifiable (Bampo et al., 2008). Viral marketing is less costly (Woerndl et al., 2008), can reach to a large number of audience relatively quickly (Cruz and Fill, 2008; Woerndl et al., 2008) through the use of social contacts (Woerndl et al. 2008) and its trustworthiness, specifically when the message is delivered by people to their social networks (Porter and Golan, 2006; Evans and McKee, 2010). Moreover, viral marketing messages are free from geographic boundaries and time constraints that make it global as compared to the conventional communications (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006).

However, marketers face certain risks and challenges when engaging in viral marketing campaigns. One of the biggest risks associated with the use of viral marketing campaign is the lack of control. The marketers have no means of control over the spread of messages and the contents of transmission (Woerndl et al. 2008; Cruz and Fill 2008). Moreover, the message recipients may think of the message as spam and may start spreading negative word of mouth against the firm. This could also promote a negative brand image, thereby causing product boycott and resulting in development of hate sites by the customers. Similarly, the consumers may feel exploited and may consider viral marketing messages as an invasion to their privacy

(Woerndl et al. 2008). Therefore, marketers should tap into the potential of viral marketing but should advance with caution as product warnings on social networking sites may build negative perceptions about a brand or a company (Phelps et al., 2004).

2.2. Informativeness and consumers' attitude towards viral marketing

Informativeness is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of advertisements (Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini, 2011). Informativeness has an impact on consumers' attitude towards online advertising as it helps them in making purchase decisions (Tsang et al., 2004). An informative advertisement not only makes consumers aware about new products, but also informs consumers that how the product is better than the competitors offers (Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini, 2011).

Information is considered as a valuable incentive in mobile advertising and recipients react positively to the advertisements that transfer quality information to them. Information provided to the consumers by means of mobile phones should consist of the features like accuracy, timeliness, and usefulness for generating positive consumers' attitude. Consumers are interested in receiving messages that are relevant for them (Haghirian et al., 2005). A study of Muzaffar and Kamran (2011), revealed a positive association between ad informativeness and consumers attitude towards SMS advertisements. Therefore, more importance should be given to the quality of information delivered through the SMS advertising messages (Muzaffar and Kamran, 2011).

However, people usually perceive low level of informativeness in mobile advertisements that they find boring. Consequently, they develop a negative attitude towards them (Blanco et al., 2010). Reyck and Degraeve (2003) maintain that advertisements containing interesting and customized information that matches customer preferences will result into their positive attitude towards mobile advertisements. Furthermore, message variety, appropriate message delivery timings with a right message frequency could also result into a positive customers' attitude toward mobile marketing messages. Similarly, Kelly et al. (2010) suggest that consumers avoid advertisements on social networking sites for a number of reasons, one of which is related to the information provided in those advertisements. On many occasions advertisements fail to target specific consumers thereby making them assume that all the advertisements would be irrelevant to them in terms of the information provided. Little control occurs over information as social media sites are represented as "anything goes" communication channels because, anyone can post anything. Hence, people neither trust these posts nor the people posting those messages (Kelly et al., 2010). Overall, it has been observed that message informativeness is an important element that affects consumers' attitude, hence, it is hypothesized that:

H1: The perceived informativeness of viral marketing messages generate positive consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

2.3. Entertainment and consumers' attitude towards viral marketing

Customer's feelings of enjoyment linked with advertisements play an important role in developing attitudes towards ads. It is necessary that viral marketing messages contents are concise and, are able to capture consumers' attention. Entertainment services add value for the customers and increase customers' loyalty thereby, leading to a positive consumers' attitude (Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini, 2011). Entertainment is a significant predictor of the value of web-based advertisements hence, determines their efficiency. Interesting and pleasing ads have a positive impact on consumers' attitude towards brands. Moreover, entertainment is the most important feature that affects consumers' attitude towards mobile advertising (Tsang et al., 2004; Bauer et al., 2005).

Viral campaigns that are based around entertainment, surprise, and joy have a major impact on consumers' response towards them. Customers show positive response towards funny and amusing messages. Therefore, entertainment is identified as one of the strongest determinants of mobile marketing acceptance among consumers' (Palka et al., 2009). According to Gangadharbatla (2008), web sites that enhance visitors' perceived sense of control, entertainment, interactivity, and brand experiences are most likely to draw out positive consumers' attitudes. This results into actual acceptance of the products and services by customers that are offered on those sites. However, Blanco et al. (2010), propose that consumers perceive mobile advertisements less entertaining as compared to other advertising mediums. In order to improve consumers' attitude towards mobile advertising and its effectiveness, marketers should consider other kinds of mobile advertising formats as well, as consumers perceive that SMS advertising alone does not offer them value. Entertainment, being an essential component of advertising messages, should be incorporated into advertising messages to capture recipients' interest and to generate favorable consumers' attitude. Hence it is hypothesized that:

H2: Entertainment positively affects consumer's attitude towards viral marketing.

2.4. Irritation and consumers' attitude towards viral marketing

Viral marketing message recipients feel irritated when the advertisers make use of the techniques that annoy, offend, or insult message recipients. Moreover, if the message contents become excessively manipulative, it also irritates message recipients and results into a negative consumers' attitude (Palka et al., 2009; Haghirian et al., 2005). Likewise, mobile advertising provides a range of information that may easily confuse, distract and over load the message recipients with information. Therefore, they may react negatively towards viral marketing messages. Moreover, as the quantity of promotional messages rises, the consumers' attitude towards the promotional vehicle worsens as it causes irritation. Irritation can be reduced by delivering appropriate message to the relevant target group that delivers value to them

(Haghirian et al., 2005). Irritation caused by the SMS advertising can be reduced by using permission based marketing concept. Hence, non-irritating mobile viral marketing leads to positive consumers' attitude (Muzaffar and Kamran 2011; Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini 2011).

According to Morimoto and Chang (2006) consumers' attitude towards e-mail marketing are determined by three factors which include perceived advertising intrusiveness, perceived loss of personal information and the irritation which is caused by such marketing techniques. Perceived ad intrusiveness is the extent to which an undesired marketing communication interferes with an individual's cognitive process and tasks. Individuals get irritated by deleting unsolicited commercial e-mails as it is time consuming. Furthermore, these unsolicited e-mails redirect the audience to other commercial websites without their consent that results in the message recipients' annoyance. Hence it has been observed that marketing messages can also lead to annoyance and irritation among its recipients and can lead to unfavorable consumers' attitude. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: The irritation caused by viral marketing messages has a negative impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

2.5. Source credibility and consumers' attitude towards viral marketing

The credibility of an advertisement is influenced by various factors, one of which is the company's credibility and the credibility of the bearer of the message. Similarly, the advertising media also, influences it. Hence, higher the perceived credibility of the advertising medium, higher is the value of advertisements and their impact on message recipients (Haghirian et al. 2005). Higher source credibility results into more favorable consumers' response towards the SMS advertisements (Muzaffar and Kamran (2011). The credibility and trustworthiness of viral message source is also closely linked with the perceived risk. If the viral marketing message comes from a trusted source, the perceived risk associated with the message is low. The message recipients express no security and privacy concerns, when they receive viral message from their social network (Palka et al., 2009).

The e-mail diffusion and misuse of the medium by means of "spam" has lowered the consumers' response rate. Normally, message recipients delete unsolicited messages, especially when it is a marketing message because people have mistrust on marketers. On the other hand, consumers normally do not delete messages coming from their social network (Phelps et al., 2004). People avoid advertising on social networking sites because of the lack of credibility of the medium and lack of trust of advertisers. Many of the users show a lack of trust in terms of the credibility of the medium, thereby, considering the material as spam and are reluctant to provide their personal information to companies as they often think of advertisers as dodgy (Kelly et al., 2010). Consumers have concerns associated with data manipulation; illegal data access, and unwanted tracking of their usage patterns along with the privacy concerns. Therefore, such risks adversely affect consumers' attitudes toward mobile marketing

(Bauer et al 2005). According to Chu and Kamal (2008) if the blogger's trustworthiness is high the blog readers will be willing to trust the information provided on blog and would read the arguments made and vice versa. Moreover, blogger's high trustworthiness will have a positive impact on blog readers and their attitude towards the brand. On the basis of the reviewed literature a strong association has been observed between message credibility and its affect on consumers' response towards the marketing medium. Hence it is hypothesized that:

H4: Source credibility of viral marketing messages, positively affects consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

2.6. Theoretical framework

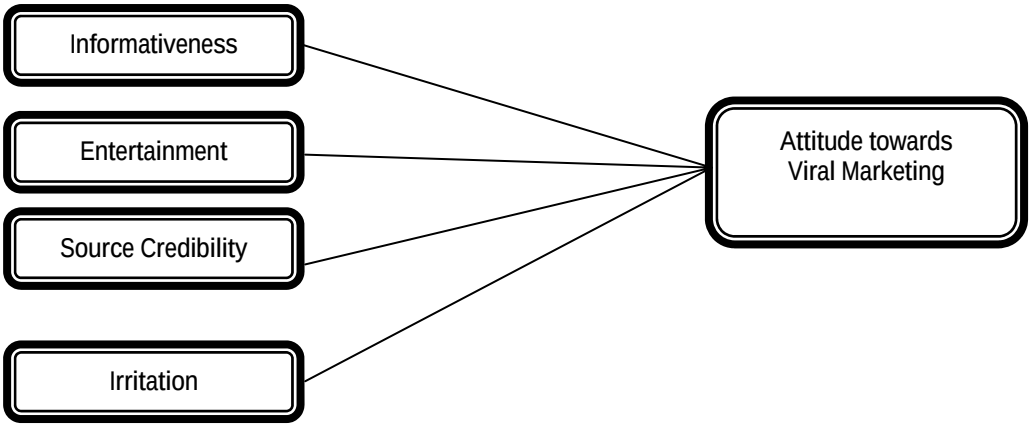


Figure 1. **Theoretical model**

Consumers' attitude towards viral marketing is usually measured in terms of their response towards the marketing messages, which are judged on the basis of their informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and their source credibility. Thus, for the purpose of evaluating consumers' attitude towards viral marketing, this research work takes into account these four independent variables; informativeness, entertainment, source credibility and irritation and analyzes their impact on the dependent variable that is attitude towards viral marketing. Literature shows that consumers' can have both positive and negative attitude towards viral marketing. If the perceived information in the viral marketing messages is relevant and useful then consumers' will have a positive attitude otherwise it will generate a negative attitude. Similarly, if the marketing messages are entertaining and are able to create consumers' interest and catch their attention then they would result in a positive attitude. Source credibility plays an important role in developing consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. When consumers' receive marketing messages from their family and friends, they are most likely to develop positive attitude because they trust the information, which is received from their family and friends as compared to the information they receive

from advertisers or other unknown people whom they do not trust. Likewise, irritation is another important factor that greatly affects consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. Most of the times such viral marketing messages cause irritation due to their excessive exposure, content repetition, privacy intrusion, or the misleading and irrelevant information provided and thus result in a negative attitude. A strong relationship is observed between these variables and their impact on attitude formation, which is also being supported by the literature.

3. Methodology

This research investigated consumers' attitude towards viral marketing in Pakistan**.** To complete the research, consumer attitude towards viral marketing was identified as dependent and message informativeness, entertainment, source credibility, and irritation were identified as the independent variables. A total of 360 questionnaires were distributed to the prospective respondents of which 216 fully filled questionnaires were received back from respondents. So, the response rate remained only 60%. The sample size for this study was 216 (N = 216) almost equally divided between both genders. The respondents included 110 males and 106 females. Fifty five percent (55%) of them were between 18 to 30 years of age; forty five percent (45%) were aged 31-45. The study sample included undergraduate and postgraduate students (42%), employees working in different organizations (29%), self-employed and businessmen (17%) and unemployed (12%). All the respondents had enough reading and writing skills to participate in the survey research. The sample educational profile included, Postgraduate degree holders (11%), Undergraduate degree holders (37%), High School certificate-equivalent of A levels or Pre-University diploma (42%) and School leavers (10%).

This study was carried out in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. The questionnaires were administered by personal delivery and by making use of the Internet for the flotation of the survey questionnaire. Convenience sampling approach was adopted in order to collect the primary data and it took a period of one month for the entire collection of data. The individuals targeted for the collection of data for this research project were users of e-mails, social network sites, blogs, and mobile phones and consisted of University undergraduate and graduate students in Pakistan, employees of different multinational enterprises operating in Pakistan along with other consumers' who make use of these mediums.

The instrument used for the collection of data was a five point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire ranged from 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = undecided, 2 = disagree to 1 = strongly disagree to measure respondents' attitude towards the dimensions of viral marketing. However, nominal scale was used for the collection of the demographical data of respondents. The instrument contained 26 items in total. The first part of the instrument contained four questions about demographics of the respondents such as, age, gender education, and profession. The second part of the questionnaire included 22 items, which contained message

informativeness (5 items), message entertainment (4 items), Irritation caused by the viral messages (6 items), source credibility (4 items) and attitude towards viral marketing (3 items).

Internal reliability test was conducted to ascertain the stability and dependability of the research instrument (Malhotra, 2004). Malhotra (2004) affirmed that the co-efficient varies from 0 to1 and value of 0.6 or less normally indicates unacceptable internal consistency reliability. Alpha coefficients value of 0.6 demonstrates weak, 0.6-0.8 shows fairly strong, and 0.8-1.0 portrays very strong internal reliability (Malhotra, 2004). The Cronbach Alpha values for Informativeness (0.636), Irritation (0.609), Entertainment (0.605), Source credibility (0.638) and attitude towards viral marketing (0.610). Hence, it shows the reliability of the data collected and its suitability for further analysis.

For the purpose of data analysis, statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 14 was used. Statistical tests were applied to check the reliability and normality of the data and correlation and regression analysis were conducted in order to see the impact of independent variables over the dependent variable.

4. Data analysis and findings

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1

Reliability statistics

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	No. of items
Informativeness	0.671	5
Entertainment	0.609	4
Irritation	0.612	6
Source credibility	0.631	4
Attitude towards viral marketing	0.618	3

Table 1 shows the reliability of the data, which was tested using Cronbach's alpha. As, evident from the above table, the value of Cronbach alpha for individual variables of Informativeness was found to be (0.671), entertainment (0.609), Irritation (0.612), Source credibility (0.631), attitude towards viral marketing (0.618) and finally for the entire questionnaire the value of Cronbach alpha was observed to be 0.754. The acceptable value for Cronbach alpha is 0.6. As for all the variables, the value of Cronbach alpha is above the acceptable value, this shows that the data collected from the survey is reliable.

Table 2 shows the normality analysis of the data. Skewness and kurtosis were calculated to ascertain the normality of the data. The values of both of these descriptive i.e. skewness and kurtosis for all the variables fall between the acceptable value of +1 and -1 hence, it portrays that the data is normally distributed.

Table 2

Normality statistics

Variable	Skewness Statistics	Kurtosis Statistics
Informativeness	-0.193	0.000
Entertainment	-0.126	-0.510
Irritation	0.069	-0.160
Source Credibility	0.021	-0.250
Attitude towards viral marketing	-0.252	-0.347

Table 3 shows the mean values for the variables. The average respondent score on overall attitude towards viral marketing was found to be 3.139 on a five point Likert scale, with 1 the least favorable and 5 the most favorable. This is above the neutral score of 3, which implies that respondents' overall attitude towards viral marketing is positive.

Table 3

Mean and standard deviation

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Informativeness	3.605	0.623
Entertainment	3.460	0.626
Irritation	3.674	0.591
Source Credibility	3.135	0.624
Attitude towards viral marketing	3.139	0.663

4.2. Correlation analysis

The table shows the correlation values for all the variables and their relationship with each other. Informativeness, entertainment, and source credibility are observed to be positively and significantly associated with attitude towards viral marketing. Correlation value of attitude towards viral marketing and informativeness is estimated to be 0.483 and the significance value is 0.000. This shows that both the variables have a strong positive significant relationship. This relationship indicates that informativeness of viral marketing messages does affect consumers' attitude towards viral marketing to a greater extent.

The correlation value of attitude towards viral marketing and entertainment is 0.377 and the significance value is 0.000. This depicts that the two variables have a significant but, a weak positive relationship with each other. The relationship signifies that the two variables do affect each other but, at a lower degree. The Pearson value of attitude towards viral marketing and irritation is estimated to be 0.069 and the significance value is 0.315. This shows that the two variables have a non-significant and a very weak positive relationship, which signifies that the two variables are not affected by each other. Hence, it shows that consumers' attitude towards viral marketing is not affected by irritation.

Table 4

Correlation matrix

	Attitude towards viral marketing	Informa-tiveness	Entertainment	Irritation	Source credibility
Attitude towards viral marketing	1				
Informativeness	.483**	1			
Entertainment	.377**	.636**	1		
Irritation	.069	-.122	-.136*	1	
Source credibility	.451**	.467**	.375**	-.039	1

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
N = 216

The correlation value of attitude towards viral marketing and source credibility is observed to be 0.451 and the significance value is 0.000, which shows a significant moderate positive relationship between the two variables. This portrays that the higher the source credibility, the more favorable attitude consumers will be having towards viral marketing. Consumers are more likely to generate positive attitude towards marketing messages, if they receive them from a trustworthy source. So, higher source credibility may result into a more positive consumers' attitude towards the marketing messages received. The study results show a moderate significant relationship between the variables, which illustrates that they do affect each other to a reasonable extent.

4.3. Regression analysis

A stepwise regression analysis is used to differentiate the contributions of the individual independent variables in attitude formation towards viral marketing.

The adjusted R square value is shown in Table 5. This indicates that informativeness is the major factor affecting the attitude towards viral marketing with a contribution of 23 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. This variable has a significance value of 0.000 and the value of beta is 0.483. This value shows that informativeness has a significant relationship with the dependent variable of attitude towards viral marketing.

The adjusted R square for the second variable of entertainment is found to be 0.138, which implies that the independent variable of entertainment causes 13.8 percent variation in the dependent variable. Whereas, the significance value is 0.000 and the value of beta is 0.377. It shows that entertainment has a significant relationship with the dependent variable and it does have a positive impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

Table 5

Regression statistics

Factor	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Beta	F	Sig.
Informativeness	0.483	0.233	0.230	0.483	65.137	0.000
Entertainment	0.377	0.142	0.138	0.377	35.484	0.000
Irritation	0.069	0.005	0.000	0.069	1.015	0.315
Source Credibility	0.451	0.203	0.199	0.451	54.525	0.000

The third variable, irritation has a significance value of 0.315 and the value of beta is 0.069. This shows a non-significant relationship between the two variables. This also portrays that irritation does not have any significant impact on the dependent variable of attitude towards viral marketing. The fourth variable, source credibility has a significance value of 0.000 and the value of beta is 0.451. This depicts that source credibility has a significant relationship with the dependent variable. The adjusted R square value is estimated to be 0.199, which means that this variable can cause 19.9 percent variation in the dependent variable, which is slightly lower than that of informativeness.

Therefore, the regression results demonstrate that informativeness and source credibility are the major factors that affect the overall attitude towards viral marketing. The factor of entertainment has a comparatively lower impact on attitude towards viral marketing as compared to informativeness and source credibility whereas irritation does not have any significant relationship with the dependent variable and hence does not have any impact upon it.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This research investigated consumers' attitude towards viral marketing and studied four dimensions that potentially influence consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. Four hypotheses were developed to test the relationship between viral marketing and perceived informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and credibility of viral marketing messages.

Firstly, on the basis of the study results H1 is accepted. This shows that the perceived informativeness of viral marketing messages does generate positive consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. The study results indicate a positive and strong relationship between the two variables thereby proving H1. The results of the current research are consistent with the results of the previous researches conducted by Tsang et al. (2004), Haghirian et al. (2005), Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini (2011) and Muzaffar and Kamran (2011). According to all these researches, informativeness is an important predictor of the value of viral marketing and plays a significant role in determining consumers' attitude.

Secondly, H2 is also accepted, as according to our study results a weak positive significant relationship is observed between entertainment and viral marketing. This shows that entertainment contents of viral marketing messages does affect consumers' attitude towards viral marketing and is able to generate positive response towards viral marketing. The results of the current study are in congruence with the results of Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini (2011) as entertainment adds value for customers and increases customers' loyalty thus, resulting in a positive attitude towards viral marketing.

Thirdly, Irritation has no significant impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. A non-significant value indicates that irritation does not have any impact on attitude towards viral marketing as compared to other variables like informativeness, entertainment, and source credibility. The study findings show that consumers do not feel irritated by viral marketing messages and irritation does not result in a negative attitude towards viral marketing. Therefore, on the basis of the study results H3 is rejected. Although, previous studies conducted by Haghirian et al. (2005) and Palka et al. (2009) mentioned that the rise in quantity of promotional messages worsens consumers' attitude towards the promotional vehicle and the excessively manipulative content of viral marketing messages result in negative consumers' attitude. However, the present study results revealed that consumers do not feel irritated or annoyed by viral marketing messages to whom they are exposed. Hence, irritation does not result into a negative consumer attitude towards viral marketing in Pakistan.

Finally, our study results indicate that source credibility does have an impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. The correlation value between source credibility and attitude towards viral marketing signifies a positive relationship between the two variables. Therefore, depending upon the study findings H4 is also accepted. Higher the source credibility of viral marketing messages, the more positive attitude the consumers will have towards viral marketing.

Present study findings are similar to the findings of Saadeghvaziri and Hosseini (2011), Muzaffar and Kamran (2011) and Haghirian et al. (2005) as their research findings also portrayed a positive effect of trustworthiness and credibility on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing.

The study findings indicate that on the whole consumers have a positive attitude towards viral marketing. Informativeness was the most significant of the factors affecting consumers' attitudes, followed by source credibility and entertainment. By providing relevant and useful information to consumers a positive attitude can be built. Likewise, source credibility plays an important role; consumers only accept and believe those messages, which they receive from a trustworthy source. Therefore, by increasing the credibility of the viral marketing messages, positive attitude can be built. Similarly, by incorporating the element of entertainment, consumers' acceptance of viral marketing messages can be increased.

However, study findings suggest that people are not irritated by the unsolicited viral marketing messages in Pakistan. Therefore, it can be concluded that

irritation does not have any significant impact on consumers' attitude towards viral marketing in Pakistan. There could be a number of reasons of this. First, as in Pakistan there is no prevailing trend of permission-based marketing and receiving unsolicited marketing messages is a normal thing for consumers in Pakistan. Therefore, people consider it as normal thing and do not get irritated. Second, there is a widespread illiteracy in Pakistan and consumers cannot even differentiate between the solicited and unsolicited marketing messages and they consider all received marketing messages in same manner. Third, consumers after receiving unsolicited or teasing marketing messages do not take any action, because of lack of customer protection laws, unawareness about the consumer rights, and because of the complicated and time consuming complaint procedures set by the companies. Therefore, majority of consumers know that they cannot do anything to stop unsolicited marketing messages.

The mobile marketing practitioners in Pakistan may use the present study findings to design viral marketing campaigns for the promotion of their brands by making use of different mediums such as, social network sites, blogs, e-mails, and mobile phones. Marketers should be paying greater attention to the information content of viral marketing messages. Authentic, relevant, and useful information should be provided to the customers in order to increase the credibility of viral marketing messages. Moreover, entertainment should be made an essential part of viral marketing messages for making it interesting for the customers. Appropriate use of these mediums can help flourish businesses in Pakistan as; viral marketing messages build two way communications between advertisers and customers thereby, fostering long term relationship with customers in a less costly manner. Furthermore, the adoption of permission-based marketing by marketers may lead to increased acceptance of viral marketing and a more favorable consumers' response towards viral marketing in Pakistan.

Some limitations were also identified in the present study. Fist, because of the time constraint the data was collected from a limited number of people. A larger sample could have generated better results with greater chances of generalization. Second, only a limited number of variables were examined in the present study. Other independent variables could also have been incorporated in the study like privacy issues, affect of incentives and the impact of permission based marketing to better investigate consumers' attitude towards viral marketing. Further research is necessary to confirm these findings and to investigate the topic in greater detail.

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About the authors

Irshad Kiani ZERNIGAH is MS (Marketing) student in Muhammad Ali Jinnah University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Previously, she completed a BBA (Honours) degree from the department of business administration, Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU), Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Her research interests include consumer behavior, technology adoption and consumption and services marketing.

Kamran SOHAIL is working as Assistant Professor in the department of business administration, Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU), Rawalpindi, Pakistan. His research interests include consumer behavior, services marketing, and social issues linked with marketing activities. He holds an MSc Management degree from Brunel University, West London, UK.

APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE					
Consumers' Attitude towards Viral Marketing					
Demographics					
Age:					
Gender:					
Education:					
Occupation:					
5. Strongly Agree 4. Agree 3. Undecided 2. Disagree 1.Strongly Disagree					
Informativeness	5	4	3	2	1
1. I find e-mail marketing messages informative.					
2. Marketing messages displayed on social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, Orkut) are informative.					
3. Fan pages on social networking sites are informative.					
4. SMS advertisements provide useful information about products and services.					
5. Internet Blogs are an important source of information.					
Entertainment					
6. I find marketing messages received via e-mails entertaining.					
7. Joining fan pages on social networking sites is entertaining and exciting.					
8. The element of humor and fun makes SMS advertisements entertaining.					
9. I find blogs entertaining as people share their views about products and services that makes them interesting and worth reading.					
Irritation					
10. E-mail marketing messages are a source of irritation.					
11. I believe that unsolicited e-mails contain viruses.					
12. Marketing messages on social media sites are irritating.					
13. I delete SMS advertisements without reading.					
14. SMS advertisements are annoying.					
15. I find blogs irritating as the information provided is misleading and unreliable.					
Source Credibility					
16. I trust the information provided by marketers through e-mails.					
17. Fan pages on social media sites are trustworthy.					

18. I trust SMS advertisements received.					
19. I trust the information provided by bloggers.					
Attitude Towards Viral Marketing					
20. I will become part of viral campaigns if they involve incentives.					
21. I consider viral marketing as a useful marketing tool for creating brand awareness.					
22. I find viral marketing messages more effective as compared to traditional media marketing messages, like T.V. and print advertisements.					