

# RECOGNIZING FACTORS INFLUENCING VIRAL MARKETING SUCCESS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF IRANIAN CLIENTS.

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## ABSTRACT

**Context and Purpose:** Although viral marketing research is relatively considerable and also qualitative, But most of them focus mainly on the different constituent of viral marketing And less research in Iran has identified the factors that influence the position of this type of marketing; Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to identify the factors that influence viral marketing success. **Analysis method:** The study population included all Tehran internet clients in the first half of 1398(second half of 2019). Data were collected through field research using a simple randomized questionnaire among 398 people during the period of July 2019 to the end of August 2019. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the conceptual model of research using SPSS software. **Results:** The results of the analysis of the research hypotheses showed that the rational effect of the message can confirm the success of viral marketing.

**Keywords:** *social networks, word-of-mouth advertising, e-commerce, message appealing appeal, message source credibility.*

## INTRODUCTION

Rapid development in the field of technology information has many cultural and economic impacts on all societies. One of the most recent and effective developments in this field may be the introduction of a large number of Internet users to social networks and the interplay of the functions of these networks with different aspects of their lives. One of the most inseparable components of the social networks that are becoming more and more popular among users is video sharing services. Sharing and posting messages on social networks has provided marketers with the opportunity to broadcast their marketing messages through this technology platform. It's a free way that is referred to as viral marketing. Viral marketing is a marketing method where the internet is used to persuade people to transfer marketing messages to others[1]. Viral marketing is an internet-based communication strategy that exploits the contagious nature of information dissemination on the Internet [2]as Moore points out: "The original inspiration for viral marketing was adapted from the "Hot Mail" model that began in 1996". In fact, many of the new concepts of internet marketing have a strong foundation in past academic marketing research [3]. In fact, viral marketing is a type of word-of-mouth transmission whereby some company, brand, or product marketing messages are widely circulated to individuals within a community (such as the Internet). Viral marketing strategy, also referred to as word-of-mouth advertising, is a concept that is spread primarily through Internet channels, such as email.[4]. In other words, viral marketing has emerged as a type of word-of-mouth advertising that involves hand-in-hand or referring to other people's news, information, or entertainment. Word-of-mouth advertising encompasses all interpersonal communication and now includes modern marketing media communication channels such as the Internet. It is important to understand that viral marketing is the result of advances in digital technology and is a generalized example of word-of-mouth communication and not just Improvement about word-of-mouth .[4]. In the world of e-commerce, online retailers exploit some of the viral features including gift wrapping and friend referral programs. With the advent of the Internet, huge amounts of information about large social networks now exists through blogs, knowledge sharing sites, social networking sites, individual groups, etc., which usually contain significant amounts of information for building individual

models., Available [5]. Due to the use of viral marketing as a process in the evolution of the marketing process, marketers have identified it as an opportunity that, if implemented effectively, leads to immediate popularity of the product or service among consumers. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors affecting the success of viral marketing. (So viral marketing is very important). Because having the information and knowledge to identify influencers is a sure guide in marketing organizations marketing activities. Understanding how the consumer understands and responds to information from outside sources is important in designing marketing strategies and communications for marketing. Consumer understanding means that the consumer receives, selects, organizes, and analyzes information to create meaning [6]. Therefore, the present study aims to evaluate the factors affecting the success of viral marketing. The rest of this article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the existing literature and provides the necessary background on viral marketing and its success factors. Section 3 describes the research methodology in full. Section 4 deals with the statistical analysis of the research data. Section 5 describes the results and summarizes the final section of the paper and provides directions for future research.

### **Research theory and assumptions**

The advantage of viral marketing is that it leads to an equal customer-to-customer relationship and is not the old relationship with the customer company that attracts the attention of the message recipient, creates interest in it and ultimately leads to customer intrusion and product sales [7].

The primary purpose of viral marketing is to use customer-to-customer versus enterprise-to-customer communications to disseminate information about a product or service that results in the fastest and lowest cost impact on the market .In other words, viral marketing allows communication to move from "consumer marketer" to "consumer-consumer".

In fact, most of the power in selling products and ideas is not through the marketing to the customer, but through the customer to the customer. Effective Viral Marketing Strategy on Consumer Shopping Behavior in Large Retail Consumer shopping behavior involves a variety of psychological and social processes that exist before and after procurement and consumption activities. Behind every procurement process conceal an important decision-making process that needs to be examined. The steps that make a client decide what kind of products and services to buy are called the buying decision process (Hawkins et al., 2004). Viral marketing activities differ in the amount of activity required by the customer to capture the virus. According to Wilson (2000)there are important factors in determining the strategy that are essential in any successful viral marketing. The first factor is that any successful viral marketing must include free outsourcing of valuable products or services. Of course, given the fact that companies are looking to make a profit, the concept of outsourcing seems a bit illogical, but it's one of the best ways to attract customers through the word "free".All we can say about this principle is that free products only serve as prey. Therefore, marketers need to have higher quality products that motivate customers to buy despite the free products. Wilson's second assertion is that any strategy should provide a smooth transition to the message, and third, that it should be easily convertible from small to large. This means that the media used for communication must be an easily replicable context capable of dealing with rapid and large fluctuations in customer engagement and action. Customers emphasize. For example, the best viral marketing strategy is to emphasize the need for customers to belong and be understood. This makes consumers feel popular with their peers by sharing a message. The other two success factors of any strategy are the use of existing communication networks and other resources. For example, a viral message needs to be effectively distributed in order to be injected into the consumer's personal network. In addition, viral marketing is trying to be cost effective too, so marketers who use this strategy should rely on other sources such as Internet magazines, YouTube and online blogs for low cost publishing.[8]. For operationalization and better execution of viral marketing, two variables of message attractiveness and message source credibility can play an important role[9]:

- **Apparent appeal of the message:** Wu and Wong 1 (2011) state that the appearance of a message can affect consumers' perceptions of the product and brand in two ways, perceived or rational[9]. Emotional appearance influences one's emotional state of mind and rational appearance represents the benefit the consumer derives from consuming the product. In

other words, rational attractiveness is the focus of the message on product features that are beneficial to the consumer[10]. The perceptual appeal of the message in the sense of arousing the consumer through emotion [11]Sensations and the phenomenon of social sensitivity sharing are key to viral communication.

- **Message source credentials:** The credibility of the source of the message means how much the recipient of the message trusts the originator of the message and does not reflect the recipient's thinking about the sender. [12]. This reflects the consumer's attitude toward the source of the message. From Wu and Wang's point of view, a message credential has two essential components, namely trustworthiness and trustworthiness. Reliability refers to the degree of trust and acceptance that the recipient of a message has toward a message that includes reliability - unreliability, truthfulness - untruthfulness, reliability, self-control, and self-control. Dispensing is specialized knowledge that the messenger of a message has to do with the specificity of the message being - unprofessional, empirical - inexperienced, knowledgeable - unqualified, unqualified, qualified [9]. One of the important benefits of viral marketing is that it has a relatively low cost compared to many other forms of marketing campaigns and programs. Another major benefit of viral marketing is related to its positive dissemination characteristics: for example, viral marketing can reach the target audience in a short period of time as the messages spread with instantaneous speed. This rapid release can increase the speed of acceptance of a marketed service or product to the extent possible. In addition to the positive points of publishing and fast publishing, marketing utilizes a friend-to-friend approach, which is one of the most influential marketing methods available to marketers. In this way, for the reason that messages are no longer spam, they override personal and legal issues, and therefore other messages are not considered spam. Viral marketing also offers the opportunity to target and target potential audiences when marketers gain access to cross-functional audiences[13]. On the other hand, the biggest risk of his Russian marketing plans is the lack of control over the implementation of this marketing approach because organizations have no means of controlling the spread of the message and the concept of transmission and message recipients may even spam the message [14]. Despite this lack of control, there is a potential negative impact of a viral marketing program. Negativity can occur through unpleasant postponement and verbal transmission, and this may lead to other issues such as: creating a negative image of a brand, sanctioning a service or product; become an organization and so on. Dependence on the consumer to convey another artificial message because consumers, for example, may be reluctant to transmit a viral message to the organization. Lack of ethical standards is another risk for viral marketing programs. Consumers may be exploited, exploited, deceived, and likely to feel that viral messages have invaded their privacy [15]. Therefore, the key factors that are applicable to viral marketing programs are five key themes: Overall structure of the executable programs, product and service characteristics, message content, publishing characteristics and friend-to-friend information channel[13]. Below, and in this regard, we will discuss some of the studies and researches on the factors affecting the success of viral marketing in their research.

Al-Abbari and Velayi (2019) conducted a study entitled "Diverse Viral Marketing: The Power of Multi-Online Sharing on Social Networks". In this paper, they introduce a new model for the flow of information on online social networks that captures the behavior shared by users when they transfer information from one online social network to their social circles[16]. They also proposed an algorithm to solve the above-mentioned optimization(Sela et al 2018) investigated the topic of active viral marketing. In this paper, they propose a new dissemination model called active viral marketing that fits into real-world marketing scenarios, where product adoption relies on active promotion and ongoing marketing efforts. In their proposed model, the success of a marketing effort to infect a potential customer (non-infectious node) depends on the number of friends their children adopt (infected neighbors). The article also proposes a set of discoveries to plan marketing efforts. Bhattacharya et al. (2018) examined the topic of viral marketing in social networks. They propose and analyze a mathematical model for understanding phenomena and evaluate digital marketing with an epidemiological approach with some realistic interactions in a social network. They used field methods as well as network analysis to investigate the phenomenon of homogeneous and heterogeneous models. They concluded that the parameter space and design strategies for running an advertising campaign would be significant[17]. In another study, Lee (2012), using the Markov Chain Model, examines the behavior of stock market participants in different market conditions. The results of his research indicate that when potential investors see a thriving market (corruption), one can see the effect of oral propaganda on stock market participants. This will increase the number of similar people who have benefited from the thriving market (they have lost

their capital in the corruption market). Worendellet al. (2009)[13] identified five important factors influencing viral marketing that have been widely influenced by viral marketing success. These include: overall company structure, product and service features, message content, communication channels, and messaging features[18]. Also, Khavir and Sumer (2009) concluded in their thesis, "Communication in Viral Marketing with a Focus on Oral Advertising," that viral marketing raises brand awareness, though. Also, Khavir and Sumer (2009) concluded in their thesis, "Communication in Viral Marketing with a Focus on Oral Advertising," that viral marketing raises brand awareness, though, but it doesn't have much of an impact on the customer's purchase decision. The results of their study also showed that the negative effect of word-of-mouth advertising is much stronger than its positive effect on customer behavior. The role of trust in viral marketing is a topic discussed in Sermanen (2009). The findings of this study show that growing distrust in marketing communications drives consumers to other sources of information. Because trust is an important factor in evaluating the validity of a message. In another study, Hasick and Sabensko (2009) found trust to be an important factor in explaining the power of word of mouth and concluded that with the increasing popularity of the Internet, trust in information has become an important topic. In another study, Palka et al. (2009) found that risk and trust are factors that influence viral marketing, especially at the beginning of the message. Their findings also suggest creating fun and enjoyment in marketing. Other researchers have confirmed the role of fun and humor in viral themes. In an article entitled "A Multi-Stage Model of Oral Marketing through Viral Marketing, Bryn (2008) developed a model to identify the role of oral marketing in each stage of viral marketing. The findings indicated that the nature of social relationships influenced the behavior of individuals. Bamboo et al. (2008) examined the effect of the social structure of digital networks and the transmission of people's behavior. Specifically, they identified different social networks to understand the moderating factors of social structures in the viral marketing model. They then looked at the actual companies in which viral marketing was prevalent and devised a model for it. Factors in this study revealed that companies and their managers had to consider those factors before applying and implementing viral marketing[19]. In another study, Kowalir and Maislin (2006) found that the effects of negative verbal advertising on important indicators of capital market efficiency such as cash flow and stock prices in the marketing literature were very little discussed. One of the most notable exceptions in this regard is a study called "Negative Customer Voice and Corporate Equity Returns" which has the effect of negative consumer talk on firm-specific equity returns. Using random parameter modeling approach after controlling for the hidden heterogeneity and traditional foundations of economics, he revealed some short-term and immediate effects.

Therefore, according to the above mentioned research hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

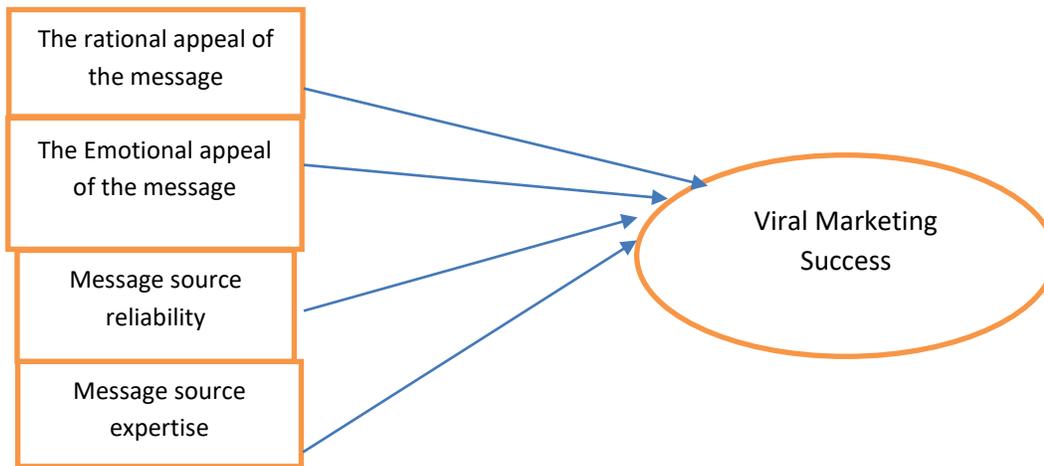
**Hypothesis 1:** The rational appeal of a message can influence the success of viral marketing.

**Hypothesis 2:** The emotional appeal of the message can influence the success of viral marketing.

**Hypothesis 3:** Reliability of the message source can influence viral marketing success.

**Hypothesis 4:** Message source expertise can influence viral marketing success.

Based on the assumptions developed, the conceptual model is designed as follows:



**Research methodology and tools**

The statistical population of this study includes all people who live in Tehran and use internet for their purchases. Sampling was used in this study because of the large population of the population. According to the unrestricted statistical population formula with confidence level of 95% and sampling error rate of 5%, the total sample size was 391.

In order to collect the research literature and review the background of the library method and the questionnaire tool, it was selected as the necessary tool for collecting field data (surveying research components of the statistical population). The research questionnaire consists of three parts: the introduction section, the demographic questions section and the questions section measuring the main variables of the research. A set of 30 questions was designed to measure the main research variables. The scale of the metaphors in this study was a five-point Likert scale (from completely agree to completely disagree). In order to increase the validity of the questionnaire, after conducting library studies and clarifying how the important concepts and variables used in the research were measured, the questions asked in the "Tang" research were designed to be relevant to the questionnaire. Experts will be advised to amend and approve. Finally, in this study, 450 questionnaires were distributed to the members of the statistical population, and 398 questionnaires were returned. Cronbach's alpha method was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire using SPSS software. Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.877. As Nunnali (1987) has stated, if the alpha is greater than 0.7, the result would be valid, so we conclude that the questionnaire used in this study is very valid.

After describing the answers obtained from the statistical community in this section, the hypotheses were examined and the statistical test used in the research was analyzed. In other words, in this section, the findings of field research are analyzed, so that the hypothesis can be statistically examined. The results of the analysis are as follows:

**Research Findings**

Descriptive statistics revealed that 63% of the study participants were male and 37% female. To test the research hypotheses, it is first necessary to determine whether the data collected on the variables have a normal distribution; Normal or abnormal distribution of data is used by the Smirnof-Kolmograf test. The results of this test showed that the significance level of all variables in this study is more than 5%, so the data have normal distribution.

The first hypothesis states that the rational appeal of the message can influence the success of viral marketing. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of responses received:

**Table 1:** First Assumption

The First Assumption	I Totally Disagree	I Disagree	No Idea	I Agree	I Quite Agree
	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent
The Rational Appeal of The Message	24 6%	11 3%	26 7%	187 47%	150 %37

As it can be seen from the table above about the assumption of the rational attractiveness dimension of the message, 24 respondents, equal to 6%, strongly disagree with the question and rate its effect at zero while 150 and Equally, 37% of the respondents were very satisfied with the impact of this item and rated it at a very high level. These results also show that 47% of the respondents agree with the impact of the rational appeal of the message on the viral marketing success and 3 percent were against. It can therefore be stated that, from the respondents' point of view, the rational appeal of the message can influence the success of viral marketing. Therefore, the first assumption is confirmed. The correlation analysis of this assumption is presented in the following table.

**Table 2:** Correlation Test

Description	The rational appeal of the message
The correlation coefficient	723/0
The significance level	000/0

As can be seen from the table above, the correlation coefficient between the rational appeal of the message and the viral marketing success is 0.723, since the level of significance is less than 5% (0.000). A variable there is a significant positive relationship. Therefore, the first assumption is confirmed.

The second hypothesis states that the emotional appeal of the message can influence viral marketing success. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of responses received

**Table 3:** Second Assumption

Second Assumption	I Totally Disagree	I Disagree	No Idea	I Agree	I Quite Agree
	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent
The Emotional Appeal Of The Message	19 %5	38 %9	15 %4	116 %29	210 %53

As it can be seen from the table above about the assumption about the emotional appeal dimension of the message, 57% of respondents (14%) strongly disagree or disapprove of the question and rated its effectiveness as poor; Eighty-five percent of respondents strongly agree with the impact of this item and rate it highly. The results also show that 29% of respondents agree with the emotional appeal of the message that viral marketing success and only 9% disagreed. Therefore, it can be stated that, from the respondents' viewpoint, the emotional appeal of the message can influence the success of viral marketing. The results of correlation analysis of this assumption are presented in the following table:

**Table 4:** Correlation Test

Description	The Emotional Appeal Of The Message
The correlation coefficient	815/0
The significance level	000/0

As can be seen from the table above, the correlation coefficient between the

Emotional appeal of the message and the viral marketing success is 0.815, since its significance level is less than 5% (0.000). A Variable There is a significant positive relationship. Therefore, the second assumption is confirmed.

The third hypothesis states that the reliability of the message source can influence viral marketing success. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of responses received:

**Table 5:** Third Assumption

Third Assumption	I Totally Disagree	I Disagree	No Idea	I Agree	I Quite Agree
	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent
Message Source Reliability	8 %2	23 %6	45 %11	146 %37	176 %44

As it can be seen from the table above about the assumption of the reliability dimension of the message source, 31% of respondents (8%) strongly disagree or disapprove of this question and have assessed its effectiveness as poor; Of the 176 respondents, or 44% of the respondents strongly agreed that this item was highly influenced and rated this effect at a very high level. Viral marketing agreed and only 6% disagreed. Therefore, it can be stated that, from the respondents' point of view, the reliability of the source of the message can influence the success of viral marketing. . The results of correlation analysis of this assumption are presented in the following table:

**Table 6:** Correlation Test

Description	Message Source Reliability
The correlation coefficient	776/0
The significance level	000/0

As shown in the table above, the correlation coefficient between the reliability of the message source and the viral marketing success is 0.776; since the significance level is less than 5% (0.000), it can be stated that between There is a significant positive relationship between these variables. So the third assumption is upheld.

The fourth hypothesis states that message source expertise can influence viral marketing success. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of responses received:

Table 7: Fourth assumption

Fourth Assumption	I Totally Disagree	I Disagree	No Idea	I Agree	I Quite Agree
	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent	Number Percent
Message Source Expertise	4 1%	17 4%	28 7%	161 40%	188 48%

As it can be seen from the table above, about 21% of respondents, 5%, strongly disagree with or disagree with the question about the message source specialty dimension, and rated its effectiveness as poor; 188 people, or 48% of respondents, strongly agree with the impact of this item and rate it highly. The results also show that 40% of respondents agree with influencing message source expertise on viral marketing success. And only 4 percent disagreed. Therefore, it can be stated that, from the respondents' point of view, message source expertise can influence the success of viral marketing. The results of correlation analysis of this assumption are presented in the following table:

**Table 8:** Correlation Test

Description	Message Source Expertise
The correlation coefficient	818/0
The significance level	000/0

As can be seen from the table above, the correlation coefficient between message source expertise and viral marketing success is 0.818, since its significance level is less than 5% (0.000). A Variable There is a significant positive relationship. Therefore, the fourth assumption is also confirmed

**5. Conclusion:** Lack of proper understanding of viral marketing in the absence of a comprehensive and appropriate framework for the successful design and implementation of viral marketing, marketers have been forced to rely on empirical testing or immersed in existing literature to attempt to employ viral marketing. This reduces the likelihood of viral marketing success as a new approach to marketing. According to his research, Iranian businesses have similar and even more severe problems in employing viral marketing, despite the increasing influence of social networks in Iran, and thus the potential of this method for designing successful marketing systems, not the acquisition itself. Businesses have the knowledge and skills to design and execute viral marketing campaigns, and not the most successful marketing and advertising companies. The lack of a comprehensive framework that can help companies and marketers design and implement a viral marketing system from start to finish has made the situation even more difficult.

Given the difficulties of designing and executing viral marketing in both theoretical and applied domains, this study has attempted to present a holistic approach to research on the topic of viral marketing to present the factors influencing the success of viral marketing from the perspective of customers in Iran. To reduce the uncertainties surrounding it in each of the theoretical and applied fields and to better understand it, especially in the Iranian business environment.

The results of this study showed that the rational appeal of the message can affect the viral marketing success. There was also a significant positive relationship between the emotional appeal of the message and the viral marketing success. Other research results showed that the reliability of the message source and Message source expertise can influence the success of viral marketing. Given these results, it is essential to gain a better understanding of viral marketing because its inappropriate use wastes scarce and valuable corporate resources as well as the potential for negative brand impact on the mind of the consumer. And consequently loss Customers win.

Based on the results of this study, managers who intend to use viral marketing are recommended to produce a product that has superior or superior features or to provide a message that contains engaging or useful content to persuade the recipient. Sending this message can provide good moments for your social network members or help them gain new experiences or solve problems. The sender of this message will try to change the mentality of others as well. The sender of the message also seeks to enjoy the social benefits of such communication, such as strengthening friendships or spiritual support, and so on. Also, if companies are able to identify and target particularly effective extroverted people in the primary targeting phase, they can greatly guarantee message dissemination because they are more willing to communicate and transmit the message to others. Opinion leaders include those whose social network members are several times as many as others.

Research findings show that regardless of the level of risk taking, message credibility is one of the factors that influence successful implementation of viral marketing. Therefore, in order to be successful in viral marketing, these companies need to design their advertising messages in a way that gives consumers the feeling that the source of the resulting message is credible. In addition, when consumers' mental involvement is high, their attention is more to the credibility of the source of the message. Therefore, if the intended product users have high mental involvement, it is better to pay more attention to the credibility of their source and the companies should try to empower all those who use the message to perceive their message successfully. Whereas the appeal of a message has a positive impact on successful viral marketing, then it offers to the companies that use viral marketing how the appearance of the message will affect the consumer's perception.

On key credibility and trustworthiness of the message, it is suggested to interact with the capital market brokers and the official telecommunication service providers (CIs), Irancell, etc. for short message propaganda by mobile phone. (Messages are sent through them and in their name because many messages sent through the SMS system in bulk display the identity of the sender of the message clearly and clearly to the recipient of the message. It is also recommended that agencies work with different people in the economic field. Identify (such as bank managers at headquarters or queue level or branch offices, etc.) and target audiences and send them a publicity message because they are highly specialized in the field of economics and do not have high credit ratings around them.

### Limitations of Future Research and Research

Implementation of research activities is always subject to limitations that may affect the results of the research and reduce its generalizability and reliability. This research was not an exception. For example, the questionnaire data collection tool is a questionnaire. The questionnaire as a data collection tool has some disadvantages that may affect the results of this study. The study was also conducted in a limited area of Iran, in Tehran. Therefore, some generalization of its findings should be considered.

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