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THE EFFECT OF VIRAL MARKETING OVER BRAND VALUE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Viral marketing is defined as a strategy that encourages individuals to convey a marketing strategy to others and thus constituting a significant potential in the distribution of the messages pertaining to the products and the services of a company. It is one of the most effective methods of creating a buzz about the products and services provided by companies. As with biological viruses, viral marketing strategies causes a message to spread to thousands then millions of people thus generating a benefit for the company in terms of brand awareness. Viral marketing is a marketing technique that encourages users who have e-mail addresses, telephone lines and social media accounts to spread a marketing message to other users. The aim of this study is to research the effect of viral marketing over brand value in social media. Survey form was used as data collection tool in the research. The questionnaire consists of 4 demographic questions, 1 social media questionnaire and 46 questions social media viral marketing scale and 4 question mark scale. Data analysis in the study was done in SPSS 16 package program. In the analysis of the data, simple and multiple regression linear analyzes were performed with descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Viral Marketing, Word of Mouth Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, brands use marketing activities to introduce themselves, to direct their products and services to consumers and to realize the sale of their products. A general definition of marketing is defined as a system of activities that facilitates not only the product and service but also the delivery and adoption of ideas to the target mass (Mucuk, 2010). Brands can introduce their products and services through marketing strategies, pass on information to their stakeholders, return to their products and communicate and interact with customers. This interaction leads to more institutional products and services in mind, increased loyalty to the organization and more sales of products and services. There are some varieties in social media, such as content marketing, database marketing, permission marketing. In addition to these marketing techniques, viral marketing, which has been applied much recently, draws attention. These differently appearing marketing techniques can be applied in the form of a marketing plan that is integrated with each other. Viral marketing refers to the fact that content created by brands themselves to promote their products and services influences people and that affected people share their message with their environment. The sharing of content on the digital media is especially important in terms of users as well as of brands with web 2.0. In the work of Allsop, Bassett and Hoskins, it is stated that 59% of users in the use of new media transmit information to their colleagues, family members and friends on the internet (2007, p.399). This leads to results such as confronting different contents for the individual, receiving information and having fun. On the other hand, sharing for brands has the potential to have viral effects. Brands that use viral marketing techniques have many advantages. The first advantage of these advantages is that the digital media based technique makes to reach the target audience cheaper, faster and easier. Another advantage is that it also reaches out to the people outside the target group, contributing to brand awareness, and the potential to reach potential new customers. Viral marketing also contributes to the reputation of brands.

2. VIRAL MARKETING CONCEPT

In virtual markets, traditional sales techniques have increased rapidly based on interactive relationships on the Internet. The effects of the Internet's technological development are not limited to being effective and widespread all over the world. This new tool and possibilities have led to a change in the relationship between the source and the recipient in the communication process. Consumers identified as recipients of this exchange of change have become active in the communication process and the communication process has become a reciprocal and recyclable structure (Deighton, 1995: 396-397). As a result, the former experience, purchases and product statements of salespeople have become more important. This has not been new since many companies have begun to take advantage of positive word of mouth communication. However, attempts to initiate word of mouth communication on the Internet have entered into the marketing literature as a concept of "viral marketing". Viral marketing has come about through the circulation of messages on the Internet. E-commerce, groups, communities and messaging; which are used by firms to improve their promotional activities (Helm, 2000: 158-161). Consumers often see an e-mail message from a friend as the most reliable source. An investigator, Draper Fisher Jurvetson, used the term "viral marketing" (Deal and Abel, 2001: 38), drawing attention to the similarity between the spread of the message in electronic form, similar to the spread of biological viruses in 1997. To benefit from this rapid expansion, Jurvetson has set up an electronic mail link on its website for the promotion of a new product and has reached 12 million Hotmail subscribers with zero subscribers (Subramani and Rajagopalan, 2003: 300). Hotmail has used a clickable web-based email as a sales promotional tool. Viral marketing has emerged thanks to the clickable button attached to every message sent to the Hotmail user. Hotmail's success in using viral marketing depends on whether the product is supported by a group of friends or comes from a friend's source. In other words, it is the consumer group that is responsible for the spread of the message, not the company officials. From this point on, every customer who uses the product gains a simple volunteer salesperson appearance. This shows that the viral marketing strategy is exponentially spread (Deal and Abel, 2001: 38). With this in mind, viral marketing is a strategy to encourage people to send a marketing message to others by creating a potential for exponential growth with effective and encouraging messages. Basically, viral marketing over the Internet refers to the technological dimension of word-of-mouth marketing. In this marketing strategy, any commitment that the firm has made is transferred from person to person. In recent years, viral marketing applications are increasing and emerging as a more popular form of marketing, especially when visibility is high (West, 2002: 1-3). In addition, viral marketing is trusted by consumers to spread the campaign (Daniels, 2002: 7). In addition to viral marketing and promotion work, where messages are spreading via e-mail, file and site addresses, distribution is a particularly cost-effective marketing practice, especially in terms of distribution (Sandler, 2001).

3. VIRAL MARKETING TOOLS

3.1. Email Marketing

E-mail is the most effective marketing tool for viral communication. Within this context, the concept of marketing by e-mail was found in marketing literature (Barutçu and Haşiloğlu, 2010: 12). Commercial messages sent to e-mail groups created in various forms on the Internet are frequently used. E-mailed advertisements can be very effective as they allow you to reach a large number of consumers in a short period of time. However, users who do not want to receive e-mails can filter out addresses from which the e-mail comes in, preventing them from re-e-mailing the same sender. So, businesses add a link to the last part of the email they send if they do not want to receive another message (Koçoğlu, et al., 2011: 18).

3.2. Mobile Viral Marketing

Along with the developments in mobile communication technologies, communication and transfer of information via social networks such as Google, Facebook, Whatsapp, Mysapace, and YouTube via mobile phones has become a medium in which marketing activities have been conducted as Integrated Marketing Communications and the concept of Mobile Viral Marketing has been developed as a strategy (Barutçu, 2011: 10).

4. VIRAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

Marketers who are trying to implement a viral marketing strategy must decide which marketing elements they want to implement. Viral marketing strategies consist essentially of six elements. Table 1 shows the use of these elements in practice. Some viral marketing strategies may not include all of these elements. As a result, marketers who want to implement an effective strategy must decide on these factors. Effective viral marketing strategies can be summarized as following (Wilson, 2000a).

4.1. Gives Away Valuable Products or Services

“Free” is the most powerful word in a marketer’s vocabulary. Most viral marketing programs give away valuable products or services to attract attention. Free email services, free information, free “cool” buttons, free software programs that perform powerful functions but not as much as you get in the “pro” version. Wilson’s Second Law of Web Marketing is “The Law of Giving and Selling”. “Cheap” or “inexpensive” may generate a wave of interest, but “free” will usually do it much faster. Viral marketers practice delayed gratification. They may not profit today, or tomorrow, but if they can generate a groundswell of interest from something free, they know they will profit “soon and for the rest of their lives” Free attracts eyeballs. Eyeballs then see other desirable things that you are selling, and, presto! you earn money. Eyeballs bring valuable email addresses, advertising revenue, and e-commerce sales opportunities. Give away something, sell something.

4.2. Provides for Effortless Transfer to Others

Public health nurses offer sage advice at flu season: Stay away from people who cough, wash your hands often, and don’t touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Viruses only spread when they’re easy to transmit. The medium that carries your marketing message must be easy to transfer and replicate: email, website, graphic, software download. Viral marketing works famously on the Internet because instant communication is easy and inexpensive. The digital format makes copying simple. From a marketing standpoint, you must simplify your marketing message so it can be transmitted easily and without degradation. Short is better. The classic is: “Get your private, free email at <http://www.hotmail.com>.” The message is compelling, compressed, and copied at the bottom of every free email message (Wilson, 2000b).

4.3. Scales Easily from Small to Very Large

To spread like wildfire, the transmission method must be rapidly scalable from small to very large. The weakness of the Hotmail model is that a free email service requires its own mail servers to transmit the message. If the strategy is wildly successful, mail servers must be added very quickly or the rapid growth will bog down and die. If the virus multiplies only to kill the host before spreading, nothing is accomplished. So long as you have planned ahead of time how you can add mail servers rapidly you’re okay. You must build in scalability to your viral model.

4.4. Exploits Common Motivations and Behaviors

Clever viral marketing plans take advantage of common human motivations. What proliferated “Netscape Now” buttons in the early days of the web? The desire to be cool. Greed drives people. So does the hunger to be popular, loved, and understood. The resulting urge to communicate produces millions of websites and billions of email messages. Design a marketing strategy that builds on common motivations and behaviors for its transmission, and you have a winner.

4.5. Utilizes Existing Communication Networks

Most people are social. Nerdy, basement-dwelling computer science graduate students are the exception. Social scientists tell us that each person has a network of 8 to 12 people in his or her network of friends, family, and associates. A person’s broader network may consist of scores, hundreds, or thousands of people, depending upon his or her position in society. A waitress, for example, may communicate regularly with hundreds of customers in a given week. Network marketers have long understood the power of these human networks, both the strong, close networks as well as the weaker networked relationships. People on the Internet develop networks of relationships, too. They collect email addresses and favorite website URLs. Affiliate programs exploit such networks, as do permission email lists. Learn to place your message into existing communications between people, and you rapidly multiply its dispersion.

4.6. Takes Advantage of Others’ Resources

The most creative viral marketing plans use others’ resources to get the word out. Affiliate programs, for example, place text or graphic links on others’ websites. Authors who give away free articles, seek to position their articles on others’ webpages. A news release can be picked up by hundreds of periodicals and form the basis of articles seen by hundreds of thousands of readers. Now someone else’s newsprint or webpage is relaying your marketing message. Someone else’s resources are depleted rather than your own (Sandler, 2001).

5. VIRAL MARKETIN OPERATIONAL MECHANISM

Viral marketing can technically be described as a kind of digital marketing of mouth-to-mouth marketing. In the digital environment, different from the conventional word of mouth marketing viral marketing is stated as following; (1) access to the Internet at a low cost and with a very wide measure of power, (2) operation and process can be easily monitored and controlled, (3) the possibility of emerging new challenges by starting from the individual interpretations in the online interaction, (4) brands are actors that initiate viral marketing while taking a passive role in word of mouth marketing (Dellarocas, 2003, p.1410; Alakushu, 2014, p.82). As a function, viral marketing is sending and spreading of a product in a digital environment by electronic mail to other potential consumers in the social environment. Thus, information about the products is exponentially spread from one person to another and meanwhile the products are directed to numerous new e-mails where they are re-infected. The spread of products in viral marketing is faster and more efficient than the use of common networks (Amazon.com, Lycos.com, Yahoo!). Consumers who reach the main page using common networks do not trust companies. On viral marketing, the user is referred to the homepage of the company on the recommendation of the friend, and his friend's advice on the company leads to the final site. Viral marketing is based on the exponential growth of an e-mail message from a friend, assuming that the recipient of this message can send it to anyone in the address book.

6. BRAND VALUE THROUGH VIRAL MARKETING

Today's developments in information technology have also manifested itself in marketing. Viral marketing offers plus value to the brand, while affecting the quality of the relationship between the brand and the consumer. In the past, tools for marketing were limited with direct mailing and tele-marketing. In traditional direct mail, the response rate of consumers is 2%, while the response rate of messages sent by viral marketing is 18%. While response to viral marketing messages is taken very quickly, this is longer and more costly in traditional direct mail. The added value of viral marketing is linked to the use of large-scale digital connections and these digital connections are relatively inexpensive, fast, easy-to-use and globally accessible. Viral marketing is an advantage for both consumers and brands. It creates valuable information, chance to obtain free and discounted products for consumers. In terms of companies, circulation in the virtual arena is the easiest way to improve their brands and raise their awareness (Kelly, 2000). Most companies use viral marketing in order to create branding value. The exposition of a company or product name with a large number of human viral propagation increases brand awareness. The 400 companies participating in the research conducted by the Institute of Management Technology (IMT) have indicated that they implement viral marketing strategies to raise product and brand awareness. Firms that implement viral marketing may have the advantage of earning more profit in the long run if they focus their short-term profits on a certain period of time and overcome brand awareness and hurdles (Thevenot et al., 2001).

7. METHOD

7.1. The Model of the Research and Hypothesis

The research is designed as a descriptive study. Descriptive research can be defined as collecting data and analyzing aggregated data for specific purposes and through systematic processes (Balci, 2013: 15). The model of the research is shown in figure 1.

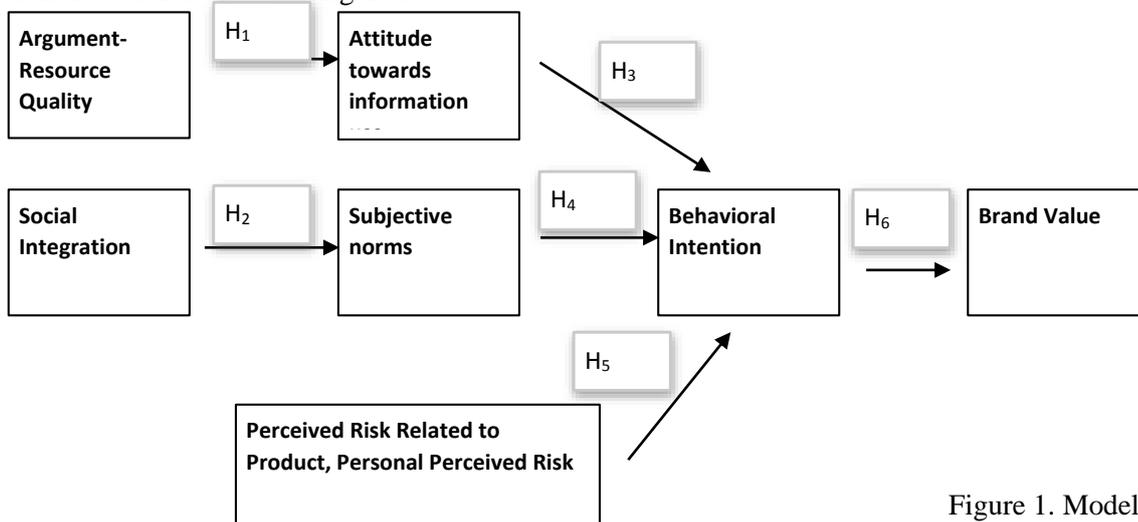


Figure 1. Model of the Study

The research hypothesis is as following:

H1: The quality of resources in social networking and media sites affects consumers' attitudes towards information use.

H2: Social integration influences consumers' subjective norms.

H3: Consumer attitudes towards the information utility of consumers influence the intention to purchase viral products and services.

H4: Consumer's subjective norms affect the intention to purchase viral marketing products and services.

H5: Risks that consumers perceive affect the intention to purchase viral marketing of product-services.

H6: The intention to purchase viral products-services is influential on brand value.

7.2. Universe and Sampling

According to Yazicioglu and Erdoğan (2004), 384 people constitute a reliable number for the infinite universe at the 5% sample rate. It was targeted to reach at least 384 persons in this research. The sample of the study consists of 400 people selected by sampling easily.

7.3. Data Collection Tool

Survey form was used as data collection tool in the research. The questionnaire consists of 4 demographic questions, 1 social media questionnaire and 46 questions social media viral marketing scale and 4 question mark scale.

Viral Marketing Scale on the Social Media: It was prepared using the work of Gunawan and Huang(2015). The scale consists of 7 sub-dimensions. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the dimensions is given in order. 0,752 for the Social Integration sub-dimension, 0,802 for the Argument-Resource Quality sub-dimension, 0,791 for the Attitude sub-dimension for information use, 0,785 for the Subjective Norms sub-dimension, 0,689 for the Product Perceived Risk sub-dimension, 0,728 for the Personal Perceived Risk sub- For intention sub-dimension, it was found to be 0,668.

Brand Value Scale: Prepared by using the scale developed by Yoo ve Naveen Donthu (2001). The scale was used in one dimension. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the brand-name scale was 0.811.

7.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis in the study was done in SPSS 16 package program. In the analysis of the data, simple and multiple regression linear analyzes were performed with descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage. Regression analysis was performed to test the hypotheses involved in the study. Regression analysis is used to test the relationship between dependent and independent variables. In this study, multiple linear regression analyzes were performed and the values were interpreted in order to measure the relationship between binary variables and simple linear regression in hypothesis tests and the effect of more than two independent variables on dependent variables.

8. FINDINGS

Findings Related to Demographic Characteristics

Table 1. Findings Related to Demographic Characteristics

		f	%
Gender	Female	213	53,2
	Male	187	46,8
	Total	400	100,0
Age	Under 21 years old	149	37,2
	22-37 years old	158	39,5
	38 years old and over	93	23,2
	Total	400	100,0

Education	Secondary school	93	23,2
	High school	114	28,5
	College	193	48,2
	Total	400	100,0
Marital Status	Single	238	59,5
	Married	162	40,5
	Total	400	100,0

When the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined, 53.2% of the participants were women, 39.5% were between 22-37 years, 48.2% were university graduates and 59.5% were married.

8.1. Findings Related to Social Media Usage

Table 2. Findings Related to Social Media Usage

	f	%	
Social Media Usage	Facebook	191	47,8
	Twitter	226	56,5
	Pinterest	112	28,0
	Instagram	233	58,2
	Youtube	292	73,0
	Flickr	141	35,2
	Google plus	103	25,8
	Blogs	141	35,2

When the findings related to participants' social media usage are examined, 73% is using Youtube, 58,2% is using Instagram, 56,5% is using Twitter and 47,8% is using Facebook.

8.2. Determination of the Wrapping Effect of Resource Quality on Information Use

Table 3. Model of Regression Analysis on the Effect of Sources of Social Network and Media on the Attitude of Consumers

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p
	Beta	Standard Mistake	Beta		
Stable	1,841	0,182		8,524	0,000
Argument-Resource Quality	0,352	0,054	0368	7,634	0,000
R² : 0,120					
F value : 58,412; p:0,00<0,05					

The regression model established is significant. When the R2 value is examined, the value is 0.120. This indicates that the quality of the resource explains the attitude towards information use by 12%. When the coefficients were examined, the quality of the resource quality was 0.352 and the value was statistically significant (p <0.05). In this context, the better the reliability of the sources that consumers have reached through social networking and media tools, the more the attitudes of individuals towards information use increase. According to this result, the hypothesis H1 was accepted.

The Determination of the Effect of Social Integration on Subjective Norms of Consumers

Table 4. Model of Regression Analysis of the Effect of Social Integration on Subjective Norms of Consumers

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p
	Beta	Standard Mistake	Beta		
Stable	2,150	0,126		10,256	0,000
Social Integration	0,356	0,045	0,378	8,604	0,000
R² : 0,140 F value : 62,354; p:0,00<0,05					

The regression model established is significant. When the R2 value is examined, the value is 0.140. This value indicates that social integration explains consumers' attitudes towards specific norms by 14%. When the coefficients were examined, the social integration coefficient was 0.356 and the value was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Accordingly, as the value of the social integration of consumers increases, their behavioral intentions increase accordingly. The H2 hypothesis is supported by this conclusion. Social integration positively affects consumers' subjective norms.

8.3. Measuring Consumers' Attitudes Towards Information Usage Attitudes to Purchasing Intentions of Viral Marketing Products and Services

Table 5. Model of Regression Analysis of Consumers' Attitudes Toward Information Usage, Impact on Purchasing Intentions of Viral Marketing Products

Model	Non-standardize coefficient		Standardize coefficient	t	p
	Beta	Standard Mistake	Beta		
Stable	1,821	0,138		9,521	0,000
Attitude toward information usage	0,482	0,045	0,491	7,142	0,000
R² : 0,218 F value : 85,214; p:0,00<0,05					

The regression model established is significant. When the R2 value was examined, the value was 0.218. This value indicates that the attitude towards information use explains the behavioral intention by 21.8%. When the coefficients were examined, the coefficient of attitude related to the use of information was 0.482 and the value was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Accordingly, as consumers' attitudes towards information use increase, their behavioral intentions will also increase positively. H3 hypothesis is supported according to this result.

8.4. Subjective Norms of Consumers, Determination of the Effect of Viral Marketing Products and Services on Purchasing Intentions

Table 6. Model of Regression Analysis of Consumers' Subjective Norms, Effect of Viral Marketing Products and Services on Purchasing Intentions

Model	Non-standardize coefficient		Standardize coefficient	t	p
	Beta	Standard Mistake	Beta		
Stable	1,254	0,130		13,214	0,000
Subjective Norms	0,462	0,044	0,473	11,548	0,000
R² : 0,220 F value : 78,521; p:0,00<0,05					

The regression model established is significant. When the R2 value is examined, the value is 0.220. This value suggests that specific norms explain 22% of behavioral intentions. When coefficients were examined, the coefficient of attitude with respect to specific norms is 0.462 and the value was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Accordingly, as consumers increase the value they give to subjective norms, their behavioral intentions will also increase positively. H4 hypothesis is supported according to this result.

8.5. Determination of Consumers' Perceived Risks (Personal and Product Related), Effect of Viral Marketing Products on Purchasing Intentions

Table 7. Model for the Regression Analysis of Impact of Consumers' Perceived Risks (Personal And Product), Viral Marketing Products-Purchasing Intentions

Model	Non-Standardize coefficient		Standardize coefficient	t	p
	Beta	Standard Mistake	Beta		
Stable	2,145	0,184		10,254	0,000
Perceived Risk Related to Product	-0,085	0,045	0,108	5,236	0,000
Personal Perceived Risk	-0,174	0,048	0,179	4,931	0,000
R² : 0,107 F value : 80,214; p:0,00<0,05					

The regression model established is significant. When the R2 value is examined, the value is 0.107. This value indicates that consumers' risks are explained by 10.7% of the behavioral intentions. When the coefficients were examined, the risk of behavioral intention effect was determined as 0,085 for the product-related risk and 0,174 for the personal perceived risk (-) ($p < 0,05$). According to this, risk perception affects the intention of behavior. H5 hypothesis is supported according to this result. As the perceived risk associated with the product increases, the behavioral intent decreases.

8.6. Intention to Purchase Viral Marketing Products-Services, Determine Effect on Brand Value

Table 8. Model for Analysis of Regression on Purchasing Intention, Effect on Brand Value of Viral Marketing Products

Model	Non-standardize coefficients		Standardize coefficients	t	p
	Beta	Standard Mistake	Beta		
Stable	1,821	0,120		8,520	0,000
Behavioral intention	0,092	0,044	0,125	7,563	0,000
R² : 0,254 F value : 78,574; p:0,00<0,05					

The regression model established is significant. When the R2 value is examined, the value is 0.225. This behavioral intention explains the brand value by 25.4%. When the coefficients were examined, the behavioral intention coefficient was found to be 0,092 and the value was statistically significant ($p < 0,05$). According to this, behavioral intention has affected brand value. According to this result, H6 hypothesis is supported. Behavioral intent perception is also increasing the brand value attitude.

9. RESULT

Consumer behavior should not be regarded solely as purchasing activity. Consumer behavior is attitudes and behaviors before, during and after purchasing. Consumers are affected by many factors in this process. Businesses must consider all these stages and apply active marketing techniques. Today, many people use social media networks. People on social media platforms have the privilege of sharing, communicating with other users and expressing themselves comfortably. In social media networks, users are constantly in contact, affecting their purchasing intentions. Businesses are in constant contact with consumers through social media tools in today's world where competition is intense and they can influence brand values positively.

In this research, consumer attitudes affecting viral marketing in social media tools were examined and the effect of behavioral intent on brand value was investigated.

The better the credibility of the sources that consumers reach through social media and media tools, the more the attitudes of individuals towards information use increase. This is similar to the work of Gunawan and Huarng (2015) on which the hypothesis is based. In the study of Gunawan and Huarng (2015), the hypothesis was accepted. Miller and Lammas (2010) point out that the reliability of the sources to which consumers have access to information is important and that reliable sources influence the purchasing intention positively.

As the value of the consumers to the social integration factor increases, their behavioral intentions also increase positively. Social integration positively affects consumers' subjective norms. Pousttchi and Wiedemann (2007) point out that in the study of mobile viral marketing perception, mutual communication and interaction in the context of social integration affected the intention of behavior positively. Zernigah and Sohail (2012) noted that social integration is an important factor in the success of viral marketing practices.

As consumers' attitudes towards information use increase their behavioral intentions also increase positively. It evaluates all the information that consumers have obtained about the product or service and this is reflected in the buying behavior. Pousttchi and Wiedemann (2007) found that knowledge is important in viral marketing success. Evaluating information as different, fun and really important to consumers increases the success of viral marketing. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) noted that the importance of shared knowledge and interest in shared content is vital in viral marketing activities.

As the value of the consumers to the subjective norms increases, the behavioral intentions also increase positively. Quah and Lim (2002) found that consumers are interested in and share messages that they find interesting and close to them. Chu (2011) stated that subjective norms are influential on behavioral intentions in his work. It has been found out that the opinions of the friends of the researchers or other persons are influential on their purchasing intentions. The majority of consumers are adopting the views of users in social networking and media sites.

As the perceived risk associated with the product increases, the behavioral intent decreases. Kutluk and Avcıkurt (2014) stated that risk is influential on buying behavior in their work. The greater the perceived risk to the product, the weaker the intent to purchase. Behavioral intent perception is also increasing the brand value attitude. The positive change in the intention to buy through viral marketing also raises consumers' perception of brand value. Moore (2003) pointed out that viral marketing has positive effects on brand value. Similarly, in Bruhn (2012) study, behavioral intention influenced by viral marketing practices positively affects consumers' brand perceptions positively.

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