IJNRD.ORG ISSN : 2456-4184
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NOVEL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (IJNRD) | IJNRD.ORG
An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Examining the Function of Travel Leadership and Determining the Key Drivers of Tourists' Intention to Forward Infectious Messages

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Abstract: Despite the fact that, messages that go viral have an impact on tourists' choices. However, very little is known about the factors influencing tourists' propensity to spread viral messages. Hence, the current study aims at investigating the factors that influence the behavioural intention of tourists towards forwarding travel and tourism related viral messages. Also, to see if there is a difference in behavioural intentions between travel leaders and travel followers. The present study is based on primary data elicited from 100 domestic tourists who visited Kerala. Samples were selected using multi-stage cluster sampling. Scale reliability was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha. To analyse the data and test hypotheses, independent sample t test, one-way ANOVA and multiple regression were performed using SPSS. The results of this study showed that elements like social benefits, viral platform usage and emotional response had an impact on travellers' intention to spread a message. Results also revealed that tourists with different levels of travel leadership (i.e., leaders vs. followers) had significantly diverse behavioural intentions.

Keywords: Behavioural intention, travel leadership, tourists' intention, infectious messages

INTRODUCTION

Electronic peer-to-peer recommendations have grown in importance with the development of the Internet, and advertisers have attempted to take advantage of their potential through viral marketing efforts (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). A piece of content created by a person or organisation that prompts customers to freely share it with their friends and family creates instant brand recognition and advocacy. This type of content is known as viral marketing. Any marketing strategy that encourages websites or users to spread a marketing message to other websites or users is known as viral marketing in the online world(Shashikala & Mahapatro, 2015). An effective viral marketing message must not only grab the audience's attention but also motivate them to spread the message to others. If the marketer can create communication techniques that connect with the target audience, a viral marketing campaign will be more likely to succeed (Kobia & Liu, 2017). The success of viral marketing

campaigns requires that customers must value the message they receive and actively send it to other customers within their social networks (Pescher et al., 2014). Therefore, the current study addresses three research questions. They are: (1) what motivates individuals to spread infectious messages on travel? (2) Do travellers with different levels of travel leadership (i.e., leaders and followers) respond to a social media marketing message differently? (3) How do individual respond to message when the users have different usage intensity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an earlier research, authors identified the factors that determine users' propensity to distribute viral content. The findings demonstrated substantial differences across user groups regarding the impact of the emotional tone and arousal level of material on sharing behaviours, also meaningful content changes users' attitudes toward sharing communications (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019). In the context of social networking sites, prior research look at the determinants of actual pass-on behaviour of viral advertising campaigns. Based on the analysis of three actual advertising campaigns, it appears that consumer views toward the advertised brand, the ad itself, and viral advertising communications in general have a significant impact on the success of viral advertising on SNSs. The likelihood that consumers will send an advertisement to their SNS contacts appears to be less influenced by social indicators (Ketelaar et al., 2016). Previous studies looked into what drives customers to share viral fashion messages. This research presented a framework to investigate empirically consumers' intents to respond to a viral fashion message by integrating the attitude theories of U&G and the ELM. Also, examined the difference in consumers' response towards social media messages especially when consumers' possess different level of fashion leadership (i.e., leaders vs. followers). The results revealed that, entertainment is the significant predictor of value expressive attitudes but insignificant in the case of utilitarian attitude. While, social benefit and interpersonal utility has no impact on value expressive attitude and utilitarian attitude. The findings also demonstrated that there was no distinction between leaders and followers in terms of attitudes generally or the degree of intention to spread a fashion marketing message. This suggests that marketers do not necessarily need to target only fashion leaders but may also choose to include their followers. In fact, fashion followers and leaders both play crucial roles in spreading a marketing message widely. (Kobia & Liu, 2017). Similarly, in another research it was found that entertainment value and purposive value were the two important factors which lead people to forward viral messages (Pescher et al., 2014).

Prior research found that, Consumption vision elaboration doesn't always stimulate visitors' enthusiasm in visiting. If an emotional response is evoked, travellers exposed to brochures with destination information that allows them to take in all of a visit's activities and scenery are more likely to develop a visit interest. As a result, in addition to directly affecting visitors' interest in a destination, an emotional response can also mediate the effect of elaborating consumption vision. Therefore emotional response plays crucial role in behavioural intention of tourists (Tercia et al., 2020). Previous study demonstrate show differences in the factors that influence how viral advertising spreads across group members and non-members. Self-disclosure does not significantly affect group members but is a substantial predictor of behaviours that are passed on by Facebook group non-members. While attitudes regarding advertising in general have no effect on this behaviour, attitudes toward social media advertising have a considerable impact on both group members' and non-members' propensity to share viral advertisements. Facebook group members' desires for group participation and self-status seeking are important

predictors of their propensity to spread viral advertisements(Chu, 2011). Further, previous research examines the relationships between types of ad appeals, sources of forwarded ads, attitudes toward the brands, attitudes toward the ads, viral intentions, and purchase intentions and builds upon the literature pertaining to Hispanic ethnic assimilation as well as consumer socialisation. The study analyses how the aforementioned antecedents affected Hispanic consumers' willingness to share online ads and make purchases from advertised brands. Result indicate that, the frequency of peer communications about commercials and viral intentions are positively correlated. Viral intentions has positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions (Korgaonkar et al., 2016).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review, the following 3 hypothesis were formulated which is to be empirically tested. They are as follows:

H1: There is significant difference among travel leaders and followers with respect to Forwarding Intention

H2: There is significant difference in the forwarding intention of viral platform users based on their usage intensity.

H3: Factors influencing the viral message forwarding behavior have significant impact on Forwarding Intention

H3a: Social benefit has positive impact on forwarding intention of viral platform users

H3b: Interpersonal utility has significant impact on of viral platform users' forwarding intention

H3c: Viral platform usage has significant effect on forwarding intention of viral platform users

H3d: Emotional response has significant influence on viral platform users' forwarding intention

METHODOLOGY

Measures

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were first asked about demographic characteristics such as gender and age. Respondents were further asked to indicate their purpose of visit to Kerala from the following list: rest and relaxation, health, business and education. Next, the questions included measures of the daily usage frequency. Further, respondents were asked to indicate the viral platform that they use most frequently to forward information about travel and tourism product from a top list of viral platforms used in India.

Measures included key constructs in the research model that investigate the factors influencing the behavioural intention of viral platform users towards forwarding infectious messages. Items were adopted and adapted from prior research and modified to fit the context of this study: Viral marketing. All constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The measures of Social benefits were adopted from previous research (Kobia & Liu, 2017) and included four statements. Interpersonal utility was measured by means of 4 items adopted from past literature (Kobia & Liu, 2017). Similarly, four items were adopted from (Tercia et al., 2020) in order to measure emotional response. To examine travel leadership, four statements from (Kobia & Liu, 2017)measure were adapted. A six-item scale was used to measure viral platform usage (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019). To examine behavioural intention of viral platform users five items adapted from (Korgaonkar et al., 2016) and (Chu, 2011).

Sampling

We gathered data using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique from domestic travellers who travelled to Kerala. The samples were chosen by segmenting Kerala into 14 districts, followed by taluk, block, and panchayat

levels. Following that, samples were chosen at random. For this study, data were collected from 100 domestic tourists who visited Kerala in 2022.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

A software called "Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)" was used to analyse the data collected from respondents. With the aid of chronbach's alpha, reliability of the instrument was measured. (Hinton et al., 2005) have recommended four cut-off points for reliability, which includes excellent reliability (0.90 and above), high reliability (0.70-0.90), moderate reliability (0.50-0.70) and low reliability (0.50 and below). Considering this Suggestion cronbach's alpha values for variables like social benefits, interpersonal utility, travel leadership, viral platform usage, emotional response and behavioural intention were obtained as .729 (high reliability), .786(high reliability), .629(moderate reliability), .882(high reliability), .776(high reliability), and .808(high reliability), respectively.

We distributed the questionnaire to 110 domestic tourists. After eliminating the missing data observations, the usable sample included 100 full responses. The demographic characteristics of the sample can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic profile of sample (n=100)

Demographic characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	33	33
	Female	67	67
	Total	100	100
Age	Less than 20 years	31	31
	20-30 years	56	56
	Above 40 years	13	13
	Total	100	100
Purpose of visit	Rest and relaxation	80	80
	VFR	10	10
	Health	10	10
	Total	100	100
Usage intensity (daily)	Less than 1 hour	34	34
	1-3 hrs	43	43
	3-5 hours	13	13
	More than 5 hours	10	10
	Total	100	100
Type of Viral Platform	Facebook	7	7
	Instagram	33	33
	YouTube	7	7
	Whatsapp	53	53
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

The sample consisted of 33% men and 67% women, most of them (56%) falls under the age category of 20 to 30 years. Majority of the participants (80%) were visited Kerala for rest and relaxation. Most participants were using viral platforms for an average time of 1 – 3 hrs on a daily basis. Of the 100 respondents, most of them are using either Whatsapp (53%) or Instagram (33%) for forwarding viral messages.

Hypotheses testing

H1: There is significant difference among travel leaders and followers with respect to forwarding intention

Independent sample t test

Table 2 shows that respondents with average scores higher than 3 were identified as travel leaders (*n*1 = 84), and those with scores lower than 3 were identified as followers (*n*2 = 16).An independent sample t test was conducted to compare forwarding intention of travel leaders vs. followers. Result in table 2 shows that, there is significant difference in the scores of travel leaders (M=20 4.126, SD= 2.642) and followers (M=3.526, SD= 4.080). The results suggest that, travel leaders really does have an effect on forwarding intention of viral platform users. Travel leaders forward more viral messages than travel followers.

Table 2 Difference between travel leaders vs. followers on forwarding intention

Variable	Travel leadership	N	Mean	SD	t	p value
Forwarding	Leader	84	4.126	2.642	3.788	.000**
Intention	Follower	16	3.526	4.080		

Source: Primary data

** Significant at1% level of significance

H2: There is significant difference in the forwarding intention of viral platform users based on their usage intensity.

One-way ANOVA

A One-way ANOVA was conducted to test for difference in forwarding intention users with different level of usage intensity. The results shown in table 3 indicate that, the effect of usage intensity on forwarding intention is insignificant F (3, 96). = 2.542, p = .061.

Table 3 ANOVA for significant difference between usage intensity and forwarding intention

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	69.959	3	23.320	2.542	.061
Within Groups	880.791	96	9.175		
Total	950.750	99			

Source: Primary data

H3: Factors influencing the viral message forwarding behavior have significant impact on forwarding Iintention

Multiple regression

A multiple regression was carried out to examine the influence of various factors on forwarding intention of viral platform users with respect to tourism viral messages. Diagnostic analysis of multicollinearity was conducted and VIF value of all the individual variable is below 6. Hence, there is no multicollinearity. Further, to check the presence of auto correlation Durbin Watson test was conducted. The DW value is 2.254 which is close to 2, hence there is no auto-correlation in the model. The regression results are presented in table 4.

Table 4 Regression analysis: effect of various factors on forwarding intention

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	SE OF B	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.920	2.020		1.941	.055
Social benefits(SB)	.328	.093	.259	3.512	.001**
Interpersonal utility(IU)	.059	.075	.059	.793	.430
Viral platform usage(VPU)	.209	.057	.344	3.675	.000**
Emotional response(ER)	.365	.104	.314	3.504	.001**

Source: Primary data

** Significant at1% level of significance

The model yield an R= .719, (R^2 = .518; SE = 2.197), and a significant model fit (F (4, 95) = 25.483, p = < 0.001**).Therefore, the results of the regression indicated that the model explained 51.8% of the variance. Hence, the model was a significant predictor of forwarding intention with predictors of social benefits (β = .328, p =.001*), viral platform usage (β =.209, p = .000) and Emotional response (β =.365, p=.001). While interpersonal utility (β = .059, p =.430) was found to be insignificant predictors. The regression equation of the model was as follows:

Forwarding intention = 3.920 + .328 (SB) + .059 (IU) + .209(VPU) + .365(ER)

Therefore, the regression results demonstrate that social benefits, viral platform usage and emotional response are the major factors that affect the viral message forwarding intention of domestic tourists who uses viral platforms. Whereas interpersonal utility does not have any significant relationship with the forwarding intention of viral platform and hence does not have any impact upon it.

CONCLUSION

The current research explored the factors influencing behavioural intention of domestic tourists visited Kerala, who also be a viral platform user. Also the effect of usage intensity on forwarding intention and finally the behavioural difference among travel leaders and followers. In the study, it was seen that travellers' intent to share a message was influenced by factors like social benefits, viral platform usage, and emotional response. Additionally, the findings showed that travellers' behaviour intentions varied significantly depending on their level of travel leadership (i.e., leaders vs. followers). On the other hand, it can be concluded that interpersonal utility has no role in persuading users to forward infectious messages. Further, usage intensity has no influence on behavioural intention of viral platform users.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study findings are limited to the forwarding intention of domestic tourists who visited Kerala only. Future research can be done on forwarding intention of both domestic and foreign tourists. Further, the study can be expanded to tourists who visit other states in India. The current study focuses viral platform users' message

forwarding behaviour towards travel messages. Future studies may also investigate the behavioral intention of users towards any other type of viral messages.

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