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**IMPORTANCE OF VIRAL MARKETING IN EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Service sectors especially educational institutions are becoming a challenge to generate revenue throughout the world. The goal of any Service industry is determined by customers using various criteria like credibility, security, communication, responsiveness, competence, reliability, brand awareness etc. One of the emerging techniques of products and services promotion through the use of technology is Viral marketing that is becoming a popular direct marketing tool for companies and Institutes across the world. It increases brand awareness and helps to achieve other marketing objectives of a business. The research was conducted to investigate importance of viral marketing in educational institutions brand image. The sample of 120 respondents selected from various institutions using a convenient sampling method. The questionnaire prepared by five-point Likert scale method. The paper concludes with a positive response of viral marketing in educational institutions.

Keywords: Viral Marketing, Service sector Brand, Business, Brand awareness, Revenue, Marketing, Products, Services, Objectives, Institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Popularity of the internet and social media, nowadays businessmen and entrepreneurs has started to explore the concept of marketing on the website. Advances in technology have helped to migrate company and consumer relationships to an interactive level, where technology contributes to brand building by creating and sustaining a long-term relationship with the customer. However, giving consumers the opportunity to voice their opinion will not always lead to positive word-of-mouth and can threaten company's good image and reputation with their consumers. The Internet plays a crucial role in building corporate brand reputation all over the world in today's market. The growth and evolution of the Internet, electronic peer-to-peer referrals have become an important phenomenon and marketers have tried to exploit their potential through viral marketing campaigns. Viral marketing can help a brand to grow quickly and cheaply, it carries more risk than that of building a brand based on relevance and relationships. This marketing strategy uses customers in a

specific market to promote a product. Multiple social media formats are used in the process, which includes social networks sites such as YouTube, email communication, and many other forms of electronic media. This marketing technique on social networks and by word-of-mouth generates publicity to increase brand awareness, with the objective of using this technique being an increase in product sales through carefully designed viral processes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The lack of knowledge and awareness of viral marketing can be counterproductive as it can create unfavourable attitudes towards services. Therefore, this problem requires more attention; its impact needs to be clearly understood by Marketing institute Managers, Institute owners, and all affiliated stakeholders of the institutes. According to the great majority of business decision-makers feels it is now much more difficult to manage the Internet, social media, and the need to respond extremely quickly are key challenges.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the viral marketing in Educational Institutions.
- To identify factors influencing the use of viral marketing
- To Analyse the Important of Viral Marketing in Educational Institutions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the view of **Angela Dobele (2005)**⁽¹⁾ the successful viral marketing campaigns are comprised of an engaging message that involves imagination, fun and intrigue encourages ease of use and visibility, targets credible sources and leverages combinations of technology.

According to **Abed Abedniya and Sahar sabbaghi mahmouei, (2010)**⁽²⁾ the role of social network websites which has influence on viral marketing, and the characteristics of the most influential users to spread, share viral content. Structural equation modeling is used to examine the patterns of inter-correlations among the constructions and to empirically test the hypotheses.

- **Antony Joe Raja V. (2012)**⁽³⁾ stated that how viral marketing spreads rapidly with a zero cost technique of social network and the significance of employing e-commerce strategy to it. The basic characteristics includes effortless transfer to others, scales easily from small to very large, exploits common motivations and behaviors, utilizes existing communication networks, takes advantage of others resources.
- **Lance Porter and Guy J. Golan, (2010)**⁽⁴⁾ stated that More than traditional advertising, Viral advertising relies on provocative content to motivate unpaid peer-to-peer communication of persuasive messages from identified sponsors. While emotive content has always been the key to capturing audience's attention in advertising, viral advertising relies on increasingly raw content for actual distribution.
- According to **Maria Woerndl, (2008)**⁽⁵⁾ five type of viral marketing factors that may critically influence the success of viral marketing campaigns are identified. These factors are the overall structure of the campaign, the characteristics of the product or services, the content of the message, the characteristics of the diffusion and the peer-to-peer Information contents.
- According to **Patrizia Grifoni (2012)**⁽⁶⁾ a mix of methods (M-marketing, social networks, viral marketing etc) to create awareness for the company's brand, products and services. It provides a theoretical framework involving elements and factors important for the planning of an on-line viral marketing campaign.
- **Ralph.F.Wilson, (2005)**⁽⁷⁾ stated that the effective viral marketing strategy consists of six elements. They are Gives away products and services, provide for effortless transfer to others, scales easily from small to very large, exploit common motivations and behaviours, utilizing existing communication and networks, takes advantage of other resources.

UTILISING SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY TO RAISE BRAND REPUTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Universities worldwide have adopted social media to an extent and successfully recruited students to their programmes using social media marketing the majority use it mostly to stay in touch with graduates and current students. Although there are numerous articles written regarding the power of social media marketing, very little is available in relation to the public sector and in particular the Higher Education sector. Also it has been identified that marketers in the public and private sectors have extremely differing viewpoints on the relevancy and importance of social media.

CONCEPT AND BENEFITS OF VIRAL MARKETING

Viral marketing is relatively inexpensive in comparison to many other forms of advertising and marketing campaigns. The other major benefit of viral marketing is it reaches the audiences within a short period of time as messages spread exponentially at a fast speed. This rapid diffusion can significantly boost the speed of the adoption of the marketed product or service. Viral marketing makes use of peer-to-peer transmission. In addition, viral marketing can help achieve substantial audience reach as marketers get access to diverse audiences through social contacts and can profit from effective targeting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

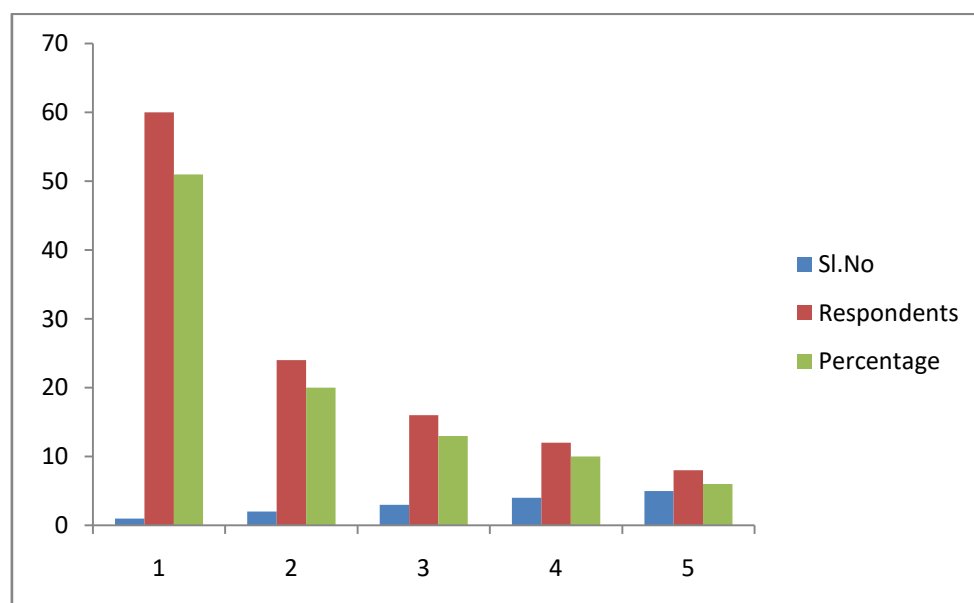
Research was conducted to collect data from respondents operating in different areas. Primary data was collected from 120 respondents and private Institutes were targeted for this study. Since a suitable sampling frame was available, from which to draw a probability sample, a convenient sampling approach was used to select respondents.

The literature review was used as the source of information to formulate the questionnaire, while a combination of closed- and open-ended questions was used. A mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to collect primary data. Questionnaires were hand-delivered to 120 respondents with interviews conducted.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

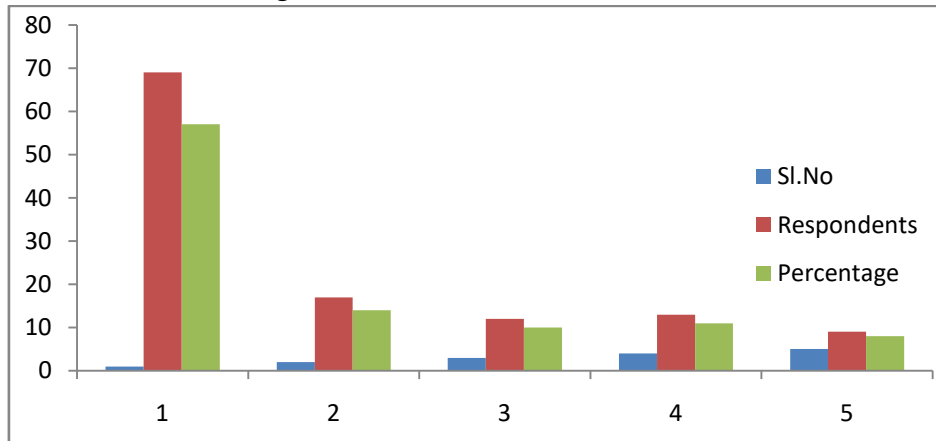
A survey was conducted with various Institutes from different areas consisting of a total sample size of 120.

Chart 1: Viral Marketing helps to strengthen the trust of brands about Educational Institutions.



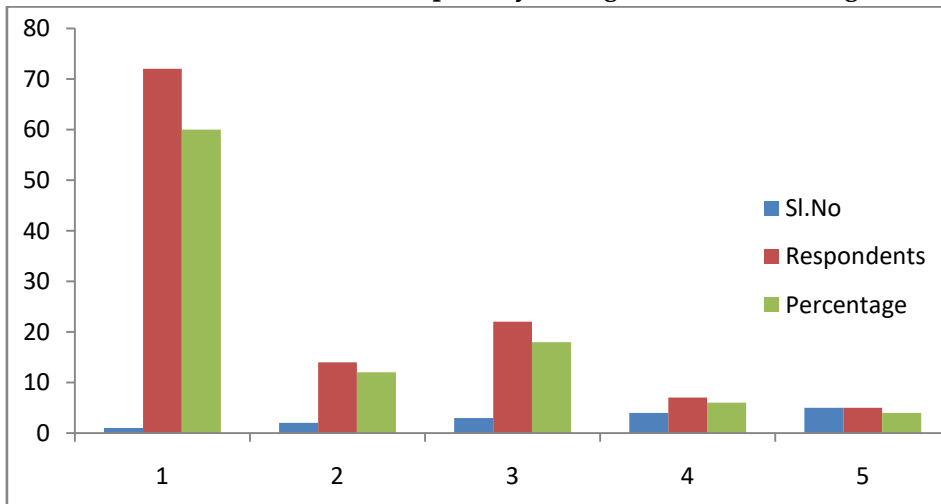
The results, as shown in Chart 1 illustrate that 60 (51 percent) indicated that viral marketing helps to strengthen the trust of brands about educational institutions. 24 (20 percent) say agree the statement. 16 (13 percent) neutral, 12 (10 percent) disagree, 8 (6 percent) strongly disagree.

Chart 2: Viral Marketing Gives Customers Freedom to Talk about the Institutes.



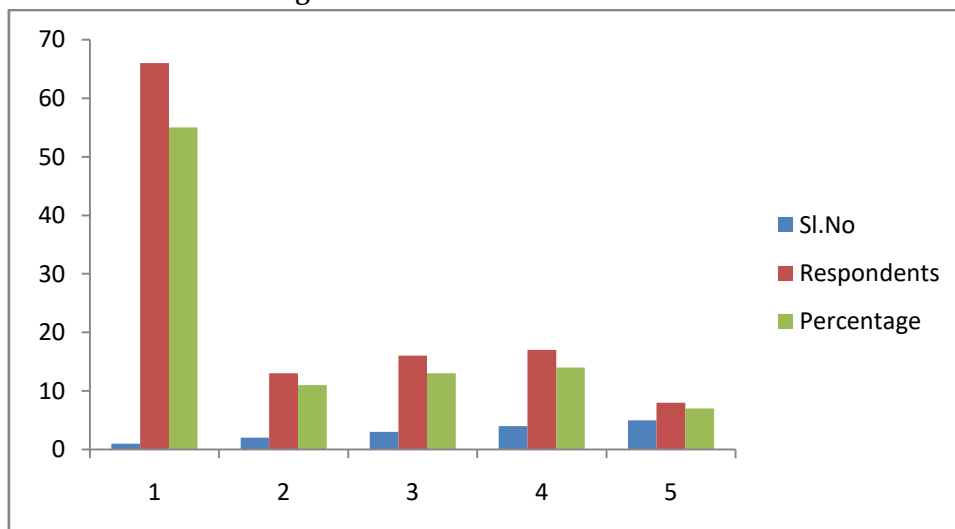
Inference: Chart 2 indicates, more than half of the respondents 69 (57 percent) strongly agree that viral marketing gives customer’s freedom to talk about their Institutes.17 (14 percent) of the respondents agree with this statement, 12 (Ten percent) are neutral, 13 (11 percent) disagree, and 9 (8 percent) strongly disagree.

Chart 3: Institutes Gains Popularity through a Viral Marketing



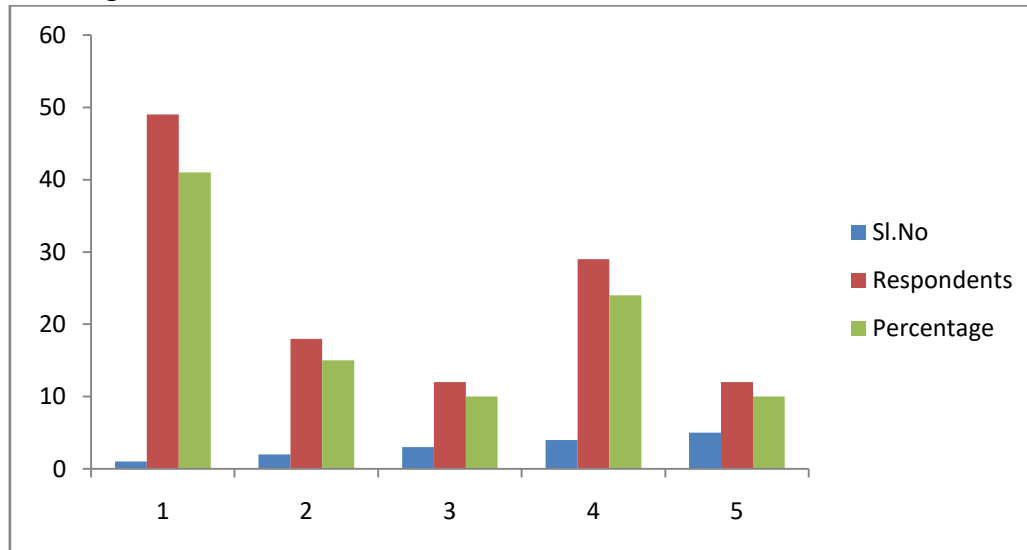
Inference: Chart 3, illustrate that72 (60 percent) of the respondents strongly agree that their Institutes gain more popularity through the use of a viral marketing platform. 14 (12 percent) agree with this statement, 22 (18 percent) are neutral, 7 (six percent) disagree, and 5 (four percent) strongly disagree

Chart 4: Viral Marketing Creates brand Awareness about the Institutes Brands



Inference: As shown in Chart 4, 66 (55 percent) are strongly agree regarding the statement that marketing creates awareness and more popularity about their Institutes brands. A small percentage 13 (11 percent) agrees, 16(13 percent)neutral 17(14 percent)disagree and8 (7 percent) strongly disagree.

Chart 5: Information and Brand Reputation about Our Institute has Increased due to the Use of Viral Marketing



Inference: The results, as shown in Chart 5, illustrate that 49 (41 percent) of the respondents strongly agree and 18 (15percent) agree that information and brand reputation about their companies have increased due to the use of viral marketing. 12 (10 percent) of the respondents are neutral, while 29 (24 percent) disagree and 12 (10 percent) strongly disagree.

FINDINGS

- Majority of the respondents 60 (51 percent) are strongly agree regarding the statement that viral marketing helps to strengthen the trust of brands about educational institutions.
- More than half of the respondents 69 (57 percent) strongly agree that viral marketing gives customer's freedom to talk about their Institutes.
- It is observed that 72 (60 percent) of the respondents strongly agree that their Institutes gain more popularity through the use of a viral marketing platform.
- Majority of the respondents 66 (55 percent) are strongly agree regarding the statement that viral marketing creates awareness and more popularity about their Institutes brands.
- It is observed that 49 (41 percent) of the respondents strongly agree that information and brand reputation about their companies have increased due to the use of viral marketing

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Marketing managers should encourage their Institutes to fully utilise viral marketing with the aid of social networking websites and other social media outlets such as Face book, Twitter, LinkedIn, and individual blogs.
- Institute Marketing Managers must notify target customers/users about the Institute social network websites to minimize negative comments.
- Institute newsletters should also be supplied to communities in order to teach them about good communications ethics, including communicating through websites.

CONCLUSION

Viral marketing helps to strengthen the trust of the educational institutions brand. Viral marketing builds a strong relationship with their target customers. It will increase their brand reputation. It was further found that it was easy to gather information obtained via viral marketing. Institutions gains more popularity through viral marketing. The use of new technologies, such as social media and social network viral marketing, is rapidly growing in the world in both the business

and service sectors. Institute Marketing Managers, directors, owners, and all affiliated stakeholders should be made aware of the value of viral marketing in promoting their business. Viral marketing is used as a good marketing tool in educational institutions due to inexpensive and reaches audiences within a short period of time.

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